THE SHADOW OF THE SWORD

HAWTHORNE DANIEL

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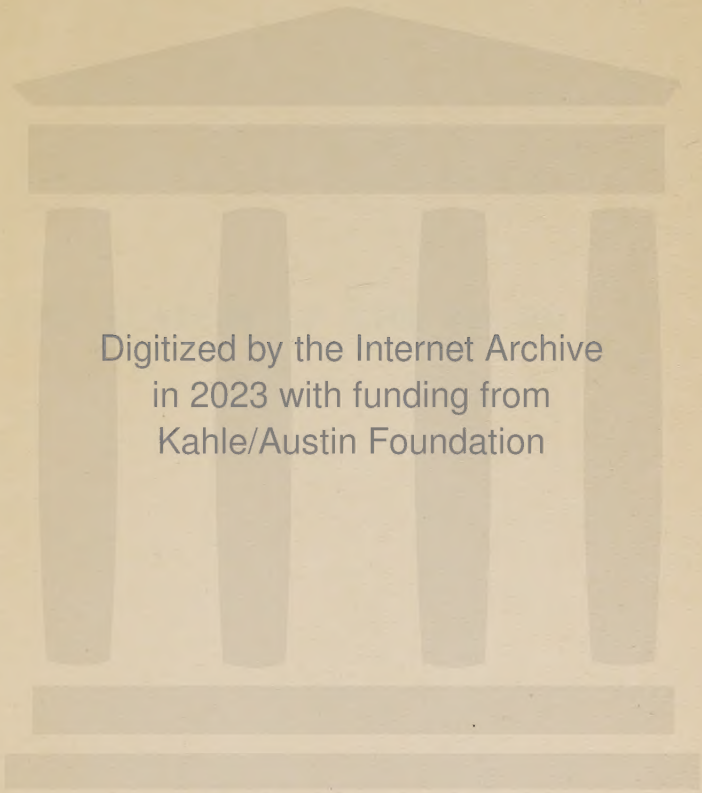
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THE SHADOW OF THE SWORD

By HAWTHORNE DANIEL

The Gauntlet of Dunmore
The Honor of Dunmore
The Red Rose of Dunmore

THE SHADOW OF THE SWORD

BY

HAWTHORNE DANIEL

Illustrated by
E. VERPILLEUX

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Set up and printed. Published, November, 1930.

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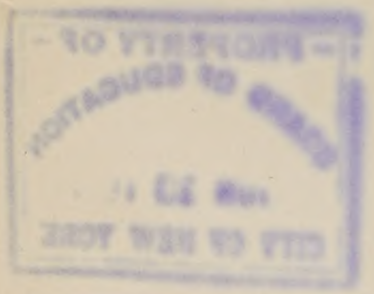

• PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA •

To

Mr. and Mrs. George Whitfield Ryan

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	Sands and Tide	3
II	Sails in the Fog	13
III	Outside the King's Gate	29
IV	Across the Sand	36
V	On Roof and Wall	50
VI	The Skirmish on the Beach	62
VII	With Sword and Buckler	81
VIII	Guard at the Gate	97
IX	Ambush	109
X	Quicksands	122
XI	Bolts and Locks	135
XII	Within the Abbey Dungeons	149
XIII	The Terrace Wall	164
XIV	The Army on the Sands	182
XV	The Battered Ramparts	194
XVI	Sir Edmund du Mont	211

ILLUSTRATIONS

His fingers, cold and stiff as they were, found it difficult to support his weight . . . . . *frontispiece*

PAGE

The boy was assigned the task of lookout 89

She whipped its soaked folds out before her 130

Ten minutes later, Edmund fell into the hands of the dungeon turnkey 153

Christophe seized the stone bench 175

Heedless of the sting of arrows, the attackers came 199

THE SHADOW OF THE SWORD

CHAPTER ONE

SANDS AND TIDE

On the northern coast of France, between two ponderous peninsulas that thrust themselves far into the English Channel and the Atlantic, lies a huge triangular bay that has never been given a name. Across its mouth, from Cape de la Hague to the rocky and tide-troubled coast of Brittany, it measures fifty honest miles, and from this wide mouth, back to where the irregular shoreline finally encloses the inner reaches of this shallow and island-studded section of the sea, the distance is at least as great. But though this enormous and often stormy triangle is without a name, its innermost restricted section is called the Bay of St. Michel. Here, enclosed on the south and on the west by the curving shore of Brittany, and on the east by the granite coast of Normandy, lies as strange a region as one can find on earth.

When the giant tides of the English Channel sweep in from the gray Atlantic and pile their rough waters up along the coast of France, the Bay of St. Michel is much like other bays. On its waves the tiny boats of the local fishermen are sometimes to be seen as their owners go about their labors, and only the two abrupt and rocky islets that break the bay's expanse mark it with a character all its own. When the tides have ebbed, however, then is the Bay of St. Michel unique, for where at high tide one can make his way by boat from near Chapelle Sainte Anne on the shore of Brittany out past the two small islands to the little cape of Andaine which lies in Normandy, at low tide one

can walk dryshod, if one is careful of the quicksands, all that distance across what, when the tide is high, is the bottom of the very shallow sea. Thus twice each day the tides rush in across ten long miles of sand—surround the little islands of Mont St. Michel and Tombelaine—dash their waves against the rocks —and then retreat once more, leaving all that vast expanse of strangely level sand uncovered, save for scattered tidepools and tiny trickling rivulets of water that wander here and there as if, in their weakness, they were blindly searching for a way to follow the huge rush of the powerful tide. Where at high tide Mont St. Michel and Tombelaine are actual islands in a sea of troubled waters, at low tide they are islands in a silent sea of sand.

Today Tombelaine is merely an abrupt and uninhabited rock, a few hundred yards in length and half as wide, with indistinct remains of crumbled and ancient walls to show that centuries ago it served as a habitation and a fortress for innumerable men. Mont St. Michel, on the other hand, contains no ruins. For twelve hundred long years of war and peace, prosperity and calamity, it has been inhabited, and inhabited it is today. The little island is roughly circular, and is hardly more than three hundred yards in diameter. All about it the sands lie level as the sea sweeps in and out, but from these lifeless levels the island lifts itself powerfully, and sweeps boldly up into a veritable miniature mountain. Its sides are steep, and its crest is high, and to the visitor approaching it across the two miles of the sands that separate it from the shore, it presents one of the most beautiful pictures in all of France. From its very base, where the waves lap when the tide is high, to the slender and graceful spire that crowns its highest tip, Mont St. Michel is an intricate mass of walls and roofs, gables and arches and spires, and standing high above the tiny and clustering town that clings to the steep side of the little mountain, are the powerful walls—

the graceful arches—the sweeping buttresses and the magnificently soaring spire of the most marvelous of all French abbeys.

Begun more than a thousand two hundred years ago, and added to, repaired, enlarged and beautified during eight hundred active years, Mont St. Michel, even today—five hundred years after the zenith of its power—is the most extraordinary spot in all of France.

It is true that to the thoughtful observer of today, the spot is sad—almost depressing—for, despite its beauty and its memories, it has lost the life that once made it one of the most important cities in all France. But now tourists stroll through the single narrow street where armored men and champing war horses once proudly clattered. Tea shops serve their patrons on the ancient ramparts where stern and watchful sentinels once carried shields and swords. Guides lead chattering visitors through magnificent halls where abbots and priors once entertained kings and princes, dukes and counts and armored knights. The island must appear almost the same as when it was a powerful, honored place, yet five hundred years have changed Mont St. Michel. Though its sturdy ramparts still stand between its little city and the rushing tides—though its abbey still crowns the island with its beauty and its power—still its greatest days were those of long ago, when Edmond, the son of Arnaud the fisherman, dwelt just within the King's Gate, and daily fared forth when the tide was high to try his hand with net and hook on the unproductive waters of the Bay of St. Michel, so that he might earn the little that was needed to support himself and his crippled father.

When the tide had ebbed, Edmond had more time to call his own, and then he might have been found out upon the sands, pacing up and down most thoughtfully. Or, sometimes, he climbed up among the trees on the northern side of the little

island, where the tree-covered slope stood so steep that no protecting wall was needed there. And having climbed up until he reached the foundation stones of that strangely beautiful portion of the Abbey called the Merveille, he sat with his back against one or another of the soaring buttresses that swept up more than a hundred breathless feet above his head, and gazed out across the two miles of smooth sands toward the island of Tombelaine. And still his mood was likely to be grave and thoughtful, despite the fact that he was hardly more than a boy, although, in those hard days a boy of nineteen was likely to consider that he was on the very brink of manhood.

It is true that the boy had responsibilities that rested heavily on him. His mother had died ten years before, and so had left him in a world of men, but later—it happened in the year 1429—his father had been crippled—almost killed—when he had been engulfed in the falling masonry when the choir of the Abbey church had suddenly (and all unexpectedly) collapsed. Arnaud had been on his way to deliver a basket of fish to the Abbey kitchen when that misfortune had befallen him, and then, suddenly, there had been a sullen roar about him. The air was filled with the dust of disintegrated mortar. Heavy slabs of stone, gorgeous bits of stained glass, carved and holy figures had suddenly fallen all about him, crushing him by their weight. And when, in answer to the roar of the collapse, the monks of the Abbey and the citizens of the town had rushed to where the masonry lay half hidden beneath the dust of the ruins, they heard the voice of Arnaud calling faintly. A hundred willing pairs of hands moved the accumulated débris—lifted the crushed fisherman and gently carried him down through the barbican with its almost endless steps—down the Great Outer Stairway, and finally through the narrow curving street that led down hill to where Arnaud lived with Edmond in their single, dimly lighted room within a score of paces of the King's Gate.

It was there that Edmond ran to find him when, having rushed to the Abbey, the boy was told of the accident. And it was in that room that the boy had suddenly realized that his father would never again be able to fare forth to fish on the Bay of St. Michel. Both his legs were crushed, and an arm, too, was cruelly battered. Edmond, the son of Arnaud the fisherman, had suddenly become Edmond, the son of Arnaud the cripple, and as such bravely faced the task of earning a livelihood for both his father and himself.

Yet, even though four years had passed since that misfortune had befallen them, it was not that that made Edmond thoughtful and serious. It was not that that drove him out upon the sands or high up to the foundations of the Merveille when the tide had ebbed. The truth is that Edmond, though he lived at a time when almost every son was expected to follow in his father's footsteps, had a great desire to spend his life at other things.

All of France was one fearful blaze of war. The English, after years and years of constant battles and forays, had conquered northern France from the English Channel to Paris and the River Loire. For years no French army had been able to withstand their onslaughts, until, in 1429, Joan of Arc, the brightest figure in all the history of France, had flashed forth from her peasant village of Domremy—had led the French army to raise the siege of Orléans—had all but dragged the doubting king to Rheims and there had seen him crowned as Charles VII. It is true that two years later she had been publicly burned in the marketplace at Rouen by the English, to whom the Burgundians had sold her after they had captured her at Compiègne. But though she was gone, she had left an indelible mark on France, just as she had, without ever having seen or heard of him, left an indelible mark in the very heart of the boy Edmond in St. Michel.

Thus it was that Edmond fished, in order that he and his father might live. And for these reasons Edmond wandered alone out upon the sands or up through the trees on the island's northern side, to sit with his back to the Merveille's mighty base, and gaze out across the sands at the island of Tombelaine. For Tombelaine, only two short miles away, was in the hands of an English army—an army of English knights and men-at-arms and archers—whose purpose was to storm the walls of the abbey-crowned island of Mont St. Michel, in order that that powerful and beautiful place might fall beneath their attack as every other bit of French territory from the Channel to the Loire had already fallen. There is little wonder that Edmond, whose heart was bold and whose shoulders were broad, should walk alone and ponder how he might be able to reverse all precedent and break away from following in his father's footsteps—to wonder how he might leave fishing to those who had no other thought but fish, so that he could become a man-at-arms and battle for the safety of that sea- and sand-surrounded home of his, against the enemies of France.

Sometimes his dreams carried him farther, it is true. He dreamed of himself suddenly chosen by some brave knight to be his squire. He dreamed of himself knighted for bravery on the field of battle. He dreamed of himself ennobled by the king, even as France's greatest knight, du Guesclin, had been ennobled, and set to rule over some city or some region of a France that had been freed, by his own efforts, from the bitter, ruinous rule of those enemies from across the narrow sea. But he knew, even as he dreamed, that all of that was childish and impossible. To become a man-at-arms—yes, that might be done, for it had been done before by such as he. But no person so lowly as the son of a fisherman was likely to become squire or knight or nobleman. He knew all that, yet, knowing it, he dreamed of it, as all of us dream sometimes of having many things we know

we cannot have. And often in the long, raw winter evenings, when darkness came early and the bleak winds whistled down the little city's only street, and shrieked about the watchmen's tower and along the exposed ramparts, Edmond loved to creep up to the barracks of the men-at-arms when some group of roistering fellows were sitting around their fire that roared in the vast fireplace. True, he was rarely permitted to get close enough to the fire to benefit from its heat, but he did not mind that; at home they had no fire after the evening meal had been prepared, for they could not afford such waste. In the barracks, however, though it was cold enough in the deep shadows far from the fire, and though the wintry winds often eddied about and even sometimes brought flakes of snow, if snow were falling outside, there were at least brave martial stories to delight one's ear. Sometimes, too, an experienced and much-traveled soldier would sing or chant the breathless lines of the "Song of Roland"—the story that above all others was told and retold in those warlike days from one end of France to the other—was told and chanted and sung in castle hall and barrack room, in abbey and in hovel.

Then it was that Edmond's heart thrilled most keenly. Then it was that he saw himself with sword and buckler in the very forefront of battle. And though he knew—as who did not?—every word of all those endless verses, still he thrilled anew each time he heard some bronzed and hardened soldier, or some wandering minstrel, chant them in the soldiers' hall. Even to think of the dying Count Roland brought Edmond's heart into his very throat. The song tells of Roland as he

> "Turns his face toward the pagan army.
> For this he does it, that he wishes greatly
> That Charlemagne should say, and all his men,
> The gentle Count has died a conqueror."

The men-at-arms paid no attention to the fisherboy, of course. The hall was large and in the end away from the fireplace it was cold. If he chose to stand there in the half-dark among the wavering shadows, it mattered not to them. They paid no attention to him save to thrust him aside if he stood in their way.

Only one of them knew him—of all the scores of men-at-arms under the command of the great Sir Louis d'Estouteville, captain of the guard, only Robert le Sagittaire knew Edmond and called him by name. Only Robert le Sagittaire nodded as the boy passed him in the street, or greeted the tired lad as he returned through the King's Gate after fishing on the tide.

As a result Edmond recognized in Robert all that was fine and manly in a man-at-arms, and loved to hear that prematurely grizzled soldier tell of his experiences on the field of battle—experiences that had begun on the awful field of Azincourt, when the French army was so horribly defeated, and led by way of battles, sieges, onfalls and adventures down to that marvelous day when, led by Joan of Arc, Robert and his fellows had fallen upon the enemy before Orléans and driven the invading English headlong from the walls. Perhaps of all the men-at-arms who obeyed the orders of Sir Louis, Robert le Sagittaire was the most experienced and the finest soldier, and small wonder it is that Edmond, longing to become a man-at-arms himself, should have almost worshipped that brave and kindly fellow.

But though the boy occupied a part of his time as I have told, still his work of fishing required all but a few spare hours, and day after day he set forth on the tide and fished, or, when the tide was out or storms blew across the Bay of St. Michel, he repaired his boat, or worked at mending nets and lines and hooks and gear.

On a hazy afternoon in June, 1433, the boy once more stowed his nets and lines within his little boat as it was drawn up on the narrow beach just outside the King's Gate. He

launched the craft into the water as others of the city's fishermen were doing, and slowly rowed a mile or more toward where the mouth of the little river Couesnon showed dimly through the faint gray haze.

Always Edmond fished there near the mouth of the little river, just as other fishermen always seemed to fish at favorite spots that they had chosen. And now again the boy was off to spend two or three hours, while the tide was high, earning the meager living that was all the fishermen of Mont St. Michel ever seemed to earn.

He rowed mechanically across the smooth water, and having reached his favorite spot, tumbled his oars into the boat, and set about making his gear ready. The lines were put in place—the hooks were baited—one after another they were cast into the water, and finally, when everything was arranged to his satisfaction he straightened up before taking his seat upon the single broad thwart that spanned the center of the little boat.

The boy had straightened for no other reason than to take a faint kink out of his back, and he gazed out toward the northwest horizon for no other reason than because he was facing in that direction. But no sooner had he looked than he looked again. He raised his hand to shield his eyes from the bright glare of the sun on the faint sea haze, and stared.

There was little that was new in the scene to cause him to stop his fishing—to stand erect and stare. The tide was high. In every direction from Mont St. Michel the undulating sea stretched serenely away. To the south and east the nearby coast of Normandy showed dimly through the faint sea haze. To the north and west the rough blue waters of the English Channel were hidden behind a curtain of light fog. Yet there on the northwest horizon, far across the waters of the bay, a fleet of indistinct sails appeared vaguely as the fog lifted mo-

mentarily, and silently disappeared once more as the gray curtain fell again across the sea.

To eyes less well trained than those of Edmond, the incoming fleet might hardly have been visible at all, and even he could not have told why it was that he knew that those ships were English. He stared at the distant bank of fog, trying once more to make out the shapes of those faint and distant sails, but they had disappeared.

But gone though they were into the thin fog again, they blotted from Edmond's mind all thought of other things. What they were coming to do he did not know, but he had had years of experience in watching every move of the powerful garrison of English knights and men-at-arms and archers that occupied Tombelaine. The result was that almost instinctively he realized that this new fleet boded ill for the little town that huddled behind its powerful wall on the steep hillside of Mont St. Michel. Even the Abbey itself, strong and rich and sacred though it was, there on the crest of its island high against the sky, seemed to be threatened by those distant and slowly moving sails. Often had the boy seen English sails coming in toward Tombelaine, yet somehow these seemed different—not mere supply ships with food and arrows for the garrison. Perhaps it was their number that impressed him, for never before had he seen so many come at once.

He hurriedly drew in his lines and rowed toward the only entrance to the town, where, beside the open gate in the tremendous wall, the summer waves slapped gently against the moss-covered stone.

CHAPTER TWO

SAILS IN THE FOG

WITH his gear gathered carelessly about him, Edmond pulled at his oars, glancing over his shoulder from time to time, in the hope that the fog would lift once more. But the northwest horizon remained hidden behind the gray curtain, and finally the powerful shoulder of Mont St. Michel cut off his view. He brought his boat about the little point of rocks that stood near the King's Gate, skilfully beached the craft upon the sand and pulled it hurriedly above the highest mark of the tide.

He still felt certain of the importance of his news, and from the calmness of the two guards who stood upon the drawbridge he knew that word of the fleet had not yet reached their ears. They could not have seen it, of course, for the whole towering island intervened, but it seemed obvious that even the guards upon the huge North Tower had failed to spy the ships as the fog had lifted. Of course, the break in the fog might not have made them visible from the summit of the tower, which rose ponderously for a hundred feet above the tide. He hoped they had not. It might help him on his way to become a man-at-arms if he could be the first to bring news of such importance.

He ran across the beach toward the drawbridge and the King's Gate, and shouted with pleasure as he saw Robert le Sagittaire on duty beneath the heavy arch. That was better than he had hoped, for he would rather tell his news to Robert than to any other person in the place.

So eager was he that he failed to notice that Robert was standing stiffly, as he was wont to stand only when the great Sir Louis d'Estouteville or his second in command, Sir Clément du Brée, was about. Even before the boy's foot had reached the first oaken board of the drawbridge, he shouted.

"Robert!" he cried. "Robert le Sagittaire! I have news!"

Even then Robert did not turn—did not wave his hand in greeting as he usually did. But Edmond did not notice. His mind was still too full of the story he was bringing.

He ran across the drawbridge, his wooden sabots resounding loudly on the boards, and still Robert stood stiffly there within the arch, as two other guards were doing nearby.

"Robert!" cried Edmond again, as he approached the guard. "A score or more of English ships are making in from sea—a score I saw as the fog lifted, and—"

Robert still paid him no attention, and Edmond, suddenly realizing that someone of importance must be near, glanced within the shadow of the heavy arch. He caught his breath in surprise and trepidation, for there, standing well within the shadow, he saw two armored men. Instantly he knew them as the great Sir Louis and Sir Clément du Brée.

They had been talking together when Edmond's shout had interrupted them, and now the stern eyes of the captain were riveted coldly on him, while Sir Clément's face bore a frown of impatience, and his eyes were narrow with anger.

The boy stopped abruptly, his heart beating heavily from his long row and his chagrin at having thus broken in upon the conversation of these exacting knights. Often had he seen them as they made their way about the little city on their military duties. Often had he stood respectfully with his woolen cap in his hands as one of them had passed sternly by, intent on weighty matters far beyond the understanding of the simple citizens of the place. He had heard many stories that

proved the strictness of Sir Louis, and just as many to prove the arrogance of Sir Clément du Brée. But never, until that minute, had he ever felt their eyes upon him, or attracted their attention. The vast gulf that existed in those days between so important a person as Sir Louis and so lowly a fisherman as himself seemed doubly vast now as Sir Louis's keen, stern eyes bored through him; and though the boy felt a vague resentment stir within him that any man—noble or knight or what-not—should be placed so infinitely above him, he recognized, at the same time, that that injustice was a fact.

Then Sir Louis spoke. "What is this news of English ships?" he asked, and even through his tumbling thoughts, Edmond felt the strength of the man in his terse, clipped words.

The boy gripped his hands tightly and strove to calm himself. A moment before, his mind had been muddled, and now, suddenly, everything was clear. He had only to tell his story to this great and powerful man and all would be well. It was better even than to tell it to Robert le Sagittaire, who still stood silently by. Perhaps Sir Louis might even make him a man-at-arms as a reward. And then he found himself speaking without knowing exactly how he had begun.

"A score of ships, my lord, are coming in toward Tombelaine," he was saying. "I saw them as I was fishing, when the fog lifted for a moment."

"A score?" asked Sir Louis, still terse. "Did you count them?"

"No, my lord," replied Edmond. "The fog lifted for but a moment, and then fell again. But there are at least a score —perhaps more— And they are English. It may be that we could see them now from the North Tower."

Sir Louis frowned.

"Come, du Brée," he said to the knight by his side, "to the North Tower, and if what this fisherboy says is true, the guards

you have placed there should be given each a hundred lashes for not spying them."

The two turned and strode off rapidly along the narrow street that ended at the King's Gate without another word to Edmond, who stood, for a moment, wondering what he might do now. He glanced at Robert le Sagittaire, his face plainly showing the question that was in his mind.

Robert frowned fiercely, and whispered to him.

"Follow them, Edmond," he ordered. "Follow them. They may wish to ask you other questions."

Only for a moment did he hesitate, and then followed them, his sabots clacking loudly on the cobblestones.

The guards stiffened to attention as the two knights reached the tower, and paid not the slightest heed to Edmond as he came clattering across the stone flagging. Nor did the two knights give him a glance. They searched along the edge of the fog, from Tombelaine, which was vaguely visible, far to the west, and as they searched, Edmond's eyes searched as well, but not a sign of anything but fog and water was there to be seen. If only the fog would lift for just a moment! If only just one of those ships would appear to Sir Louis and Sir Clément! But there was nothing out there on the sea—nothing but fog and the sunlight on the fog. For a moment neither of them said a word, and then Sir Clément, with his arrogance plain in the very tone of his short laugh, turned about.

"The fisherboy has lied, Sir Louis," he commented. "If from here we can see nothing, how could he see more from his boat? He might well be lashed for bringing such false news."

Edmond straightened as if he had been struck by a whip.

"I do not lie, my lord," he cried. "Clearly I saw them as the fog lifted for a moment, and they are English."

"Silence!" snapped Sir Louis. He turned toward Sir Clément, as if Edmond had not spoken. "If such a fleet has

come," he began, "it bodes no good for Mont St. Michel. And if the ships are out there in the fog, good fortune seems still to follow them. For weeks no sign of fog has been about us, and now, upon this very day, when the fog has come, they may have sailed in with it."

He paused for a moment, and frowned thoughtfully.

"Perhaps," he went on, "it would be best to send a man to spy upon them when the night has come. A score of ships would mean more men for their garrison, and that could only mean that they intend to push the siege. For months they have been quiet, and I do not trust a quiet English army. It is not their way."

Sir Clément laughed, still arrogantly.

"It is not likely that they have come," he replied. "We have nothing save this common fellow's word for it."

Edmond stiffened again, but before the words would come, Sir Louis spoke.

"Ne'ertheless, I shall send a spy tonight," he insisted.

Sir Clément frowned, and then shrugged his shoulders.

"If you insist," he replied. "Then, with your permission, I'll go myself."

"Do you know the sands?"

"Well enough."

"Who will go with you?"

"I would rather make the attempt alone."

Sir Louis frowned. "There are grave risks to be run," he said presently. "A companion would—"

"Would be an added risk," interrupted du Brée.

Sir Louis shook his head.

"The fishermen, who best know the sands," he replied, "most often go out upon them in pairs. Then, if one should be caught by the quicksands, the other can aid him."

Sir Clément shook his head impatiently.

"From here to Tombelaine there are no quicksands," he insisted.

"But beyond!" replied Sir Louis. "The ships will be beyond, and quicksands enough are there."

"Still I prefer to go alone," insisted du Brée.

"Very well," nodded Sir Louis. "When will you start?"

"At midnight."

"Then go and rest meanwhile," ordered Sir Louis. "I shall look to the ramparts and the guard."

For a hundred weary years France had been at war with England. English king after English king brought army after army across the Channel to harry France—to take Harfleur and Bordeaux—to capture Paris and almost half of France. Tombelaine had been captured by the invaders nearly eighty years before the time of which this story tells, and they had retained the rocky island until 1420. Then, for three years, Tombelaine fell once more into the hands of the French king, who lost it to the English again in 1423.

After this recapture of the rocky little island, the English greatly strengthened it—built heavy ramparts round about its rocky sides—built barracks for the army, and heavy stone houses for the knights and noblemen. They realized full well, for they were experienced in war, that to capture Mont St. Michel, which in all that hundred years of awful war was the only spot in northern France that had not at some time been in their possession, they had need to erect a powerful base from which to launch their attacks and press their siege.

When first the English had appeared at Tombelaine, the defenses of Mont St. Michel were slight enough. The powerful wall that later came to surround the little island, save on the north and west where the very steepness of the rock made any other defense unnecessary, had been built only in part. From

the powerful North Tower to the great King's Gate no wall existed, and the clustering town below the lofty Abbey's sturdy walls lay open to attack; only the sweeping tides and the treacherous quicksands served to keep the foreign newcomers from success. Finally, under the leadership of Robert Jolivet, Abbot of Mont St. Michel, the vast, curving wall was finished —was buttressed with turrets and bastions—was manned by men-at-arms and archers; and the people of Mont St. Michel looked out from behind this formidable defense with more feeling of security than ever they had had before.

But though the people of Mont St. Michel still kept the invaders from conquering the little island, hardly any other part of northern France was able to succeed so well. Messenger after messenger rode madly through the night—crossed the sands on far-spent mounts, or crept across on foot, and told the fearful story of defeat after defeat. Town after town—castle after castle—battles and skirmishes, all seemed to go against the French, until Robert Jolivet became fearful and ill at ease. If all these other strongholds were falling one by one, what, he wondered, was to keep Mont St. Michel, too, from falling? For months the question troubled him. Finally, certain that his abbey and his city must some time yield to the enemy, he left the Abbey, journeyed far across the desolate countryside to Rouen, and there—exactly how and why no one to this day knows—sold himself to the English; betrayed his people and his trust, and received in return one thousand livres a year.

What arguments he used to justify himself will probably never be learned; what promises he made to the English we cannot tell. But of one thing there is no doubt: the men who still remained within the Abbey of Mont St. Michel were of a different breed from their abbot. Having heard the shocking news of his cruel defection, they hesitated not at all. Jean

Gonault, the Abbey prior, was solemnly elected vicar-general, and under his able rule, the monks, the soldiers and the citizens of the island community determined never to permit one of their enemies from across the narrow seas to cross their drawbridge save as a prisoner.

Thus it was under the rule of Prior Jean Gonault that Sir Louis d'Estouteville took his place as captain of the guard. And it was not until twelve years after Robert Jolivet had become an English puppet that Sir Clément du Brée—young, handsome, arrogant, and daring—came to the little island city as second in command of the island guardians.

He had been knighted only the year before, but had already had more than a little experience in war. Still, he was all but unknown when—a year or so before our story opens—he had come with letters from the king. But Sir Louis had not been loth to place him in the position of importance that he held, for the older knight was sadly in need of help.

Throughout all Mont St. Michel Prior Jean was loved and honored. His justice was even, and his decisions were strong. Nor did Sir Louis stand less well among the people he defended or among the men-at-arms he commanded. But Sir Clément du Brée, new and young and arrogant, had, in the time that he had been upon the island, made no such reputation for himself. The people of the little city did not give their hearts nor their trust to one who had as yet been put to no great trials to show his honesty of purpose or strength of character.

And as the others felt, so felt Edmond. Never in all his nineteen years had Prior Jean so much as seemed to see him, yet for the prior the boy would willingly have died. Nor had Sir Louis, until that very day, ever seemed to realize that Edmond lived and breathed, yet for the captain the boy would willingly have taken any risk.

For Sir Clément, however, there was no such feeling. No one

questioned his honesty or his sincerity. Yet no love was his. Yet, such was the vast extent of the gulf that separated such folk as Edmond from Sir Clément du Brée, that the slightest word of criticism of the knight—the slightest sign of disrespect—would have brought the lowly culprit quickly to the dungeons of the Abbey—might, had the disrespect been ever so little more than very small, have brought the unlucky malefactor to his death in a hempen noose.

Consequently, though Edmond bitterly felt the slighting remarks of the younger knight, he could do nothing to bring about their retraction. He did not even dream of making such an attempt, which was, he knew, foredoomed to utter failure. He could do nothing. It was the *privilege* of those placed as Sir Clément du Brée was placed, to say what they pleased about the common people of the place. It was almost his privilege to treat them like the dogs that prowled the streets. This Edmond knew, and though he raged within, he kept his rage most carefully from the sight of others.

Edmond and his father lived, as I have said, in a single dark room on the town's only street, within a score of yards of the King's Gate. No window served to light the dingy place, and the single narrow door opened darkly into an angle of stone walls across from the watchman's tower that stood high above the frowning ramparts. Few were the possessions of the crippled fisherman and his son. A rough sort of invalid's chair, three crude stools, and a heavy table made up all the furniture, except for the bed built into an alcove. Beside the fireplace, the smoke from which had blackened the walls and ceiling, were a copper kettle and a few other cooking utensils. From the rafters above hung festoons of nets and coils of lines. Odd bits of fishing tackle lay here and there—fish hooks, floats, a short harpoon, and a pair of oars. On a shelf built against

the wall was stored the little stock of food—a loaf of black bread, a withered bunch of turnips, a dozen dried and salted fish, and a jug of wine.

Arnaud, seated in his chair, was engaged in repairing a net, his good arm active, but his bad one awkward enough as he tried to force it to do its share. Such work is slow at best, and Arnaud found it doubly so, but from early morning until dark he worked at such tasks, for all his life he had been active, and now, broken as he was, he would have gone mad had he been forced to sit idle. But the work was monotonous and tiring, and so from time to time he paused and listened to the sounds that came faintly from outside.

From long experience he could interpret most of them. A little while ago he had thought that he heard Edmond's voice coming from the direction of the King's Gate, but he decided that he was mistaken, for the tide still offered two hours or more of fishing. That was the worst of conditions as they were, he mused. In those three years when the English had been absent from Tombelaine—that was ten years ago, now—the fishermen of Mont St. Michel bravely took their boats well out to sea. Often he had fished full half-way to St. Malo on the west, and once had sailed to within sight of the island of Jersey to the northwest. What hauls they had made in those days! So numerous were the fish that sometimes there was hardly room left in the boats for the fishermen. But now they had fallen again on evil days. Not once within the year had Edmond been able to catch so many as fourscore fish on the tide, and many times six or eight or a dozen were all that he brought in. And it was not that Edmond was a poor fisherman, for the others did the same.

And of course, when the tide was out it was impossible to fish at all, for the waters receded across those level surrounding sands, leaving both Mont St. Michel and Tombelaine

desolate in the vast expanse. In a boat, of course, when the tide was high, one could be safe enough, but when the low tide left the sands exposed, then indeed one had need for care. Firm the sands looked—very firm—and to those who knew, there were winding ways of crossing them in almost any direction. But those who did not know had best stay within the walls at low tide, for quicksands were more than common, and looked as like the firmer sands as one great wave looks like another on the stormy sea. Few there were who had ever learned all the secrets of those treacherous quicksands. The English had been unable even yet, invariably, to travel safely across their quaking dangers. And no one within fifty years had ever learned their treacheries so well as had Arnaud himself who, many a time, and merely for the sport it offered, had crossed and recrossed their most treacherous stretches where no other could be brought to follow.

But now—the crippled fisherman shook his head—of what use was his knowledge of the sands when his legs could no longer carry him across them? And what use, too, was there in being a fisherman any more, when it was impossible to take a boat out to where the fish came readily to one's nets?

He heard a familiar footstep and looked up eagerly.

"Ho, my son," he cried as the door opened. "Have the saints heard our prayers? How many fish today?"

"None, my father," replied Edmond. "As I sat fishing, the fog lifted for a moment and I saw a fleet of English sails making in toward Tombelaine, so I stopped my labors and hurried to report them to the guard. But when my lord d'Estouteville and my lord du Brée took me to the North Tower, the fog had closed in once again and no ships were to be seen. Whereupon my lord du Brée said that I had lied. But the ships *are* there, my father! I did *not* lie!"

"Ay, I know," frowned his father. "And when the tide

has ebbed, they will be in the shelter of the cape of Andaine within half a mile of the village of Genets, stranded in a tide pool not four feet deep. Ah, my son, would that there were fifty men here at Mont St. Michel who knew the sands as I do! Then, if only the fog would remain until the dawn, we might burn those ships as they lie helpless. But I alone know the quicksands well enough to lead such a band, and my legs—" He shrugged his shoulders.

"My lord du Brée goes tonight to spy upon them," announced Edmond.

"What?" asked Arnaud in surprise.

"Yes," insisted the boy. "He and Sir Louis spoke in my presence. He goes tonight alone."

"But did you not say that my lord du Brée had said you lied?"

"Yes, but I did not lie."

"I know, my son. But why is it that he says you lie, and then decides to risk his life to spy upon the ships which, if you have lied, are not there?"

"But I did not lie," insisted Edmond.

"Yes, my son. I know you did not. But first my lord du Brée says you did, and then says that he will go to spy upon them. If he believes you lied, then how can he believe that there will be any ships upon which to spy? And if he believes that the ships have come, how is it that he says you lie?"

Edmond looked puzzled.

"I know not, father," he admitted, "yet it is as I say."

"Yes, my son. I know." He paused a moment before he continued. "Yet there is something strange about it all. You say my lord du Brée is to go alone?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"He said that a companion would be an added risk."

"And he is to go to spy upon the ships?"

"Yes."

"'An added risk'?" repeated Arnaud in surprise. "An added risk? It is not true, and full well my lord knows it. 'Twixt here and Tombelaine that is true enough, but beyond—where the ships will most certainly be—there a man is mad to venture on the sands at night alone. My boy, there is in all this something strange. 'Tis treason, I know, and neither you nor I may breathe a word of it, lest we be thrown into the Abbey dungeons for questioning the honor of a nobleman—but it is my belief that my lord du Brée has other plans than those you overheard."

"I heard it all," insisted Edmond, "and I have told you all."

"Then, my son," nodded the fisherman solemnly, "my lord du Brée will most certainly bear watching."

"Who is there to watch him?" asked Edmond.

"You, my son," replied Arnaud. "You. There is no other. It may be that the safety of Mont St. Michel rests only upon you."

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CHAPTER THREE

OUTSIDE THE KING'S GATE

To Arnaud, no less than to Edmond, the dangers of questioning the purposes or of spying on the activities of Sir Clément du Brée were obvious. Many times had both the crippled fisherman and his son seen fearful punishments inflicted for trifling derelictions. Only six months before, Jean the carpenter had been hanged in the horrible method of the day for no reason that his family and his friends had ever learned. Edmond almost shivered as he thought of it. One day Jean was whistling as he worked, and joking as he had always joked, and the very next morning he was standing beneath the gallows tree, his face pale and gaunt from a night spent in the torture chamber. Edmond had seen him led to the gallows, as most of the rest of the population of the little city had. What he had been asked under torture, nobody seemed to know. What he had replied was equally unknown. And all he said before the noose was placed about his neck was "I swear by St. Michael that it is not true." And then the priest had held a crucifix before him, had hurriedly muttered a Latin prayer. Hundreds of his fellow-citizens stood silently by, watching but doing nothing more. The hangman tied the unresisting fellow's hands behind him, and called two assistants. The three of them, with an unconcern that in itself was horrible, hauled on the rope and hoisted the helplessly struggling carpenter high up beneath the black timber of the gallows. He writhed silently, and one of the hangmen unconcernedly climbed the gal-

lows and leaped down upon the shoulders of the unfortunate carpenter. There was a horrible dull snap, and the writhing legs fell still. A low murmur rose from the throng, and they slowly turned away after having seen another brutal exhibition of medieval justice.

Such a punishment might have come upon the luckless carpenter for an offense no greater than that proposed to Edmond by his father. Such a punishment might even have come for less, as both the crippled fisherman and his son well knew. Yet, conscious of the vital importance to Mont St. Michel of any dereliction of the officer who was second in command of the little city's guard, neither Edmond nor Arnaud hesitated for a moment to face the possibility even of so terrible a punishment as that of the unfortunate carpenter. They realized how vital it was to keep their actions secret. No faint suggestion of their plan must come to other ears. They could trust no one, because the fear of punishment might drive any other who learned their plan to tell of it in order to protect himself from the torture and the noose.

So Arnaud and his son, with many a careful glance at their door to make sure that no one might overhear, whispered together through the afternoon—whispered and planned and questioned until the fading light of evening had darkened the shabby room almost into the blackness of night. What Sir Clément planned to do they did not know. They had no proof that his plans were other than those he pretended to have. Yet Arnaud, crippled and handicapped though he was, had, perhaps, become even more keen and thoughtful than he had been before his great misfortune had come upon him. Since he had been carried from the wreck of the Abbey church to his bed four years before, he had been, to his acquaintances, merely a crippled fisherman tied to his invalid's chair by his inability to walk. Actually, the energy that he had formerly expended at the

hardest kind of outdoor work, now went, at least in part, to thought—to contemplation—to reflection.

One result of this was that he had learned to piece together bits of news and gossip that came to him into more or less clear conceptions of actual fact. He had learned that simple facts often serve as guideposts pointing the way to unsuspected conclusions. And so, he felt, might the few facts he

had received concerning Sir Clément's announced plan to spy upon the ships.

"My son," he explained in whispers as the two sat talking in the dusk, "bear this in mind. It may be that we are wrong in our conclusions. From what you tell me it would seem that perhaps my lord du Brée plans something that is not so chivalrous as he would have my lord d'Estouteville believe. Thus you must follow him across the sands tonight and determine, if you can, what it is that my lord du Brée is planning. If he is honest, no harm will be done, for we shall keep our own coun-

sel and say naught of what we've done to anyone. If he is *not* honest, then it were well that someone here at Mont St. Michel should know of it.

"And now, my son, methinks 'twere time for you to go. In half an hour, or a little more, the King's Gate will be closed, and there will be no way for you to get beyond the walls. My lord du Brée will go at midnight, but you cannot make your way past the guard then. Get you out of the gate now, as if on an errand to your boat. Work about it for a time, and then, when you feel certain that no one is watching, climb within it and keep as silent as you may. With good fortune the guards will forget that you are outside the wall. The gate will be closed, and from your boat you can watch until my lord du Brée comes forth. The night, even if the light fog lifts, will be dark, for there is no moon, but you can tell when he has come. Then follow silently.

"Go now, my son. And may St. Michael guard you!"

As Arnaud had hoped, Edmond was forgotten by the guard within ten minutes after he had gone out to his boat, and when the great drawbridge was lifted, to the clank of its heavy chains, and the great gate was closed protestingly on its hinges, the boy was lying silently in the bottom of his boat.

Slowly the night came down. High against the sky the city and the Abbey stood, sentinel-like in the fading light. From within the boat the boy could see the silhouette of the island's heavy walls, of the ponderous turret beside the King's Gate. He could hear, from time to time, the movements of the guards who paced the ramparts—the ring of their pikes as they sometimes struck against the stone—the clash of their breastplates, as they leaned, now and then, in some embrasure, or in the narrow window high above the gate, the better to see out across the darkening sands.

High up the steep and rocky side of the little island he could see the dim, gray wall of the Abbey, soaring skyward—crowned by the Abbey church—dominated by the infinitely slender spire from the very apex of which, half a thousand feet above the sands, the statue of St. Michael—the island's patron saint—raised his sword aloft. The boy in the boat strained his eyes to see that protecting figure, and could barely discern it against the sky. He breathed a prayer to the saint and turned a little to one side in order to see the better and to hear.

The town was silent now. It huddled in the gathering darkness there on the steep hillside below the towering Abbey walls, hidden half by the ponderous ramparts, and half by the night. A dog barked faintly from the single street within, and Edmond smiled. He knew that dog—it was a half-grown puppy that belonged to Pierre, the son of Jacques the fisherman. The faint and friendly sound made him feel less lonely—less cut off from his friends, his father, and his home.

He turned his eyes toward the Abbey again, and saw a light as it shone faintly through a window high up the wall. He tried to determine just what window it might be, but so dark had it grown that he could not. He lay with his eyes focused on that tiny point of light—his mind full of strange thoughts—waiting until he should hear the rattle and roar of the drawbridge as it was lowered in order to let Sir Clément du Brée pass. Had he realized that, even as he watched that distant light, his action in reporting the incoming ships was being discussed there, he might have been more interested even than he was.

The room in which the light burned was a small one, looking down upon the town and the King's Gate. Within, in the light of half a dozen candles, sat the captain of the guard and Prior Jean Gonault, the vicar-general of the Abbey, upon whom rested the responsibility of governing both the Abbey and the town. The vaulted ceiling faded into heavy shadow above the candles,

whose light fell brightly only on the dully polished table and on the stern and thoughtful faces of the prior and his visitor. Except for their voices there was not a sound, save when a candle flame sputtered faintly and wavered as the light June breeze moved the heavy draperies at the door.

For some time Sir Louis had been talking, his crisp words clear and forceful in the silence of the stone-floored room. But finally he finished having told of Edmond's report of the arrival of the English fleet.

"And what do you propose to do, Sir Louis?" asked the prior.

"Du Brée goes tonight to spy upon them," replied the knight.

The prior nodded. "I suppose that that is wise," he admitted, "but I doubt whether it is important. The walls you guard are strong. I doubt that they could be taken. And only today I have been assured that the piers that support the central spire of the Abbey church and the statue of St. Michael are sturdy once again. Only when the statue falls—so goes the prophecy—will the Abbey and the island be successfully attacked. For three years the spire has been in danger—as you know—ever since the choir collapsed. The choir remains to be rebuilt, of course, but the spire is safe once more—and with it the safety of the statue of St. Michael is assured. I am almost at my ease once more—for the first time, I believe, since the departure of Abbot Robert Jolivet."

Sir Louis sat silent for a moment.

"One thousand livres a year," he muttered at last.

The prior looked up with a puzzled frown upon his kindly face.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"'Tis a goodly sum," nodded Sir Louis. "A goodly sum. Or it would be, if only one could come honestly by it!"

The puzzled frown on the prior's brow deepened.

"And what has a thousand livres to do with the English who endanger us, Sir Louis?" he asked.

"Everything," replied the knight. "That is the sum, so I am told, that the English pay Robert Jolivet. And for that sum he stays away for twelve years from the Abbey of which he is supposed to be the head. What can it be that he does, do you suppose, that the English should be willing to pay him a thousand livres a year?"

The prior shook his head.

"You do not know?" demanded Sir Louis, suddenly.

Prior Jean looked up in surprise.

"No, I do not know."

"Then I shall tell you," announced the knight. "He is in the pay and under the protection of the English. He sits at their council tables and advises them in their campaigns against his own people."

The prior blinked slowly at the candles, and pulled his gown more closely about him as a cool breeze fanned the candle flames.

"So I have been told before," he replied. "But we have no proof of it. And now the English have been defeated at Orléans and elsewhere, and the danger, it seems to me, is less than it was. Here at Mont St. Michel the walls that you and your men-at-arms defend are strong—very strong, and they were built in large part, as you know, by Robert Jolivet himself. And now the spire that supports the statue of our patron saint is firm once more. We are in a position much stronger than we have ever been before.

The knight sat silent for a moment, and then slowly shook his head.

"The walls are strong, Father," he replied at last, "very strong. And the spire is sturdy once again. Yet—if the enemy but knew it—we are weaker now than we have been in years."

"Weaker?" cried Prior Jean. "How can that be? We have more than fourteen-score men-at-arms, with you and du Brée to command them. And you yourself have said that our military supplies are ample. Wherein are we weak?"

"The Maid is gone!" replied the soldier.

"The Maid?" asked the prior, leaning forward toward the candles. "You mean Joan of Arc—the Maid of Orléans?"

"Yes, Father."

"But what had she to do with Mont St. Michel?" asked the churchman.

"Nothing—and everything."

A frown creased the prior's brow.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I am but a blunt soldier," replied d'Estouteville, "yet can I see something that may be less clear to you who do not make a business of war. Tell me: how could this young girl—this weak woman—this inexperienced maid drive the English from Orléans and accomplish in two months what the finest soldiers of France had been unable to accomplish in a hundred years?"

" 'Twas with the help of God," replied the prior.

"Without doubt," nodded the knight. "But the weapons that were wielded were in the hands of men. The Maid brought to them the spirit—the will—to conquer. That was God's gift to her, and through her to France. And now she has been burned at the stake. Ay. And in the pay of those who burned her, influential at their council tables, informed as to their plans, is Robert Jolivet—traitor, thrice accursed traitor!"

The prior leaned back in his carved oaken chair and frowned thoughtfully, staring at a shadow on the floor.

"Father Jean," went on the knight, "I warn you. Strong as are our walls, Mont St. Michel is weaker this very day than at any time since Joan of Arc first led a victorious French

army against the invaders of France. For a time, such was the spirit she imparted, one French man-at-arms was capable of defeating a dozen of these enemies of ours. And now what? I hear my men sometimes when they do not know I hear.

"Last year what did they say? They laughed. 'What?' they asked. 'Fourteen-score of us to three thousand English? Well, what is that? We need no more!' And *now* what do they say? They wonder how fourteen-score men-at-arms can defend walls so extended as are these and they ask, 'How can it be, if God aided the Maid at Orléans, that He permitted her to be condemned to the flames?'

"Their spirit, Father, is as water, and I have seen men fail in battle for no other cause than that. The will to victory decides the battle. For a time it was ours, for the Maid gave it to us in full measure. But now, alas, it has returned to our enemies. What the outcome will be I do not know."

For a moment the two remained silent, and finally the knight arose.

"With your permission, Father," he continued, "I must go. I cannot do what the Maid so magnificently did, but mine is the task of bringing back to these men of ours, if only I can, their confidence, their belief in themselves—their belief in the powerful protection of Saint Michael who still watches over them. If I am wanted, I shall be at the King's Gate, where I must go to see du Brée started safely on his way."

As Edmond, from his boat, still lay watching the faint light high up the side of the Abbey wall, he saw a shadow pass before it, watched it a moment longer, and suddenly saw it go out, leaving the vast pile of the Abbey in utter darkness, barely visible against the clouded sky. He felt the spell of the place about him. No sound now came to his ears, and apparently every soul within the Abbey and the town was asleep; but he knew that, though no sign of light appeared in all that enormous mass

of masonry, a group of monks, high up there in the church, were performing their religious duties through the night. Not a sound came from the ramparts to his ears, yet he knew that all about the walls armed guards were peering out into the blackness of the night. He wondered what his father was doing, and imagined him still sitting in his invalid's chair, telling his beads, perhaps. He wondered where du Brée might be—in his quarters, probably, beside the stairs at the opposite end of the street, preparing for his venture on the dark and level sands. He wondered where those English ships had gone, and visualized them stranded or at anchor in the tide pool, sheltered by the little Cape of Andaine.

He raised himself and sat up in his boat, safe in the darkness. The black mass of the walls and town and Abbey appeared vaguely as they towered high above him against the sky. But across the sands not a thing was visible. For three hours more, he knew, one could stay out on the sands, but for three hours only, for then once more the tide would come sweeping in, as fast perhaps as he could run. Resistlessly it would sweep across those level sands—would surround Tombelaine and Mont St. Michel—would send its waves to lap gently at the ramparts, if the weather stayed calm, or would pound and roar and foam about the walls if a storm should blow. All of that the boy in the boat knew well. He did not fear the tide, for he knew the tide. He did not fear the sands. But suddenly his heart leaped into his very throat, for a creak came from within the gatehouse. A heavy clank followed, and then, with a rumble, the drawbridge fell slowly across the moat. Edmond heard voices in the arch, and then the sound of footsteps on the echoing drawbridge.

His time of waiting was over. Sir Clément du Brée was on the sands.

CHAPTER FOUR

ACROSS THE SANDS

EDMOND peered carefully over the gunwale of his boat, but, despite the fact that his eyes by now were quite accustomed to the dark, he could not see the knight until, having crossed the drawbridge, Sir Clément turned and walked past at a distance of no more than a dozen feet. The drawbridge was being raised as the knight disappeared again into the darkness, and Edmond seized the opportunity to slip from the boat under cover of the sound. Immediately he found that it was more difficult to follow than he had anticipated, for in the darkness he could not make out Sir Clément's footprints in the sand, and when he approached closely enough to the man he was following to be able to hear the faint swish of his footsteps as he walked, the boy knew that his own footsteps, in turn, could as readily be heard. But having set himself the task of following, he did his best not to fall so far behind as to lose the knight in the darkness or to approach too closely lest he be detected.

For half an hour he followed without being conscious of the exact direction that the knight was taking. That Sir Clément was walking rapidly was the only really obvious fact. But suddenly Edmond realized that where, up to that time, he had been unable to make out anything in the blackness save the bulk of Mont St. Michel itself, as for a time it had reared its hugeness up against the sky behind them like a vast shadow in

the night, now, ahead, he could vaguely make out another such vast shadow—shapeless, huge, unreal.

At first he was not sure that his eyes had not deceived him, and then, quite suddenly, he saw a tiny point of light, as if a candle stood lighted in a window. Furthermore, just after he had made out that tiny light, he noticed that Sir Clément's course changed sharply toward it. Then, so suddenly as to startle the boy, he heard the clash of metal on stone, as if a watchman's pike had fallen. And now, more surprising still, he heard Sir Clément's voice, sharp and clear, call out into the night.

"Ho, sentinel," cried the knight in English, and Edmond stopped short in his tracks, his heart throbbing suddenly in his very throat.

"Who goes there?" demanded a voice.

"A friend!" replied du Brée. "Has my lord abbot Robert Jolivet come to Tombelaine this day with the fleet?"

"I cannot hold converse with you," replied the fainter voice of the sentinel. "That is the business of the captain of the guard."

"Then call him," ordered du Brée. "I have no desire to wait here on the sands."

Edmond's heart was throbbing heavily. He knew only Norman French, of course, and had been unable to understand what was said, but that here was treachery was beyond doubt. Yet, if the sentinel permitted du Brée to pass within the English ramparts, how could Edmond, left alone outside, learn anything further?

Tombelaine was defended by no such walls as surrounded Mont St. Michel; yet so numerous were the knights and men-at-arms and archers within those walls that anyone unwanted would have a very slight chance of getting in and getting safely out again. Nor was there the slightest purpose to be served

by being caught and hanged. As a matter of fact, the boy realized, if this action of du Brée's were half as treacherous as it seemed to be, and were the English to learn that du Brée had been followed, they would the more carefully guard against any information being taken back to Mont St. Michel.

On the rampart there had been a shout or two, and now, faintly, came the sound of a man in armor striding along the wall. Once more a voice called out.

"Who are you?" demanded the newcomer.

"Sir Clément du Brée," replied the knight. "I come seeking my lord abbot Robert Jolivet."

"Are you alone?"

"Yes."

"Then follow the wall until you reach the postern gate. It will be opened for you."

Edmond listened carefully, and presently heard du Brée reach the rocks at the foot of the wall. The boy followed silently, not knowing what he might attempt to do. And then, suddenly, he once more heard voices ahead, caught the flash of a horn lantern as it was held for a moment in du Brée's face, saw, in the faint light, the burnished arms of a group of men as they crowded in the restricted arch of the postern gate, and saw, too, the iron-studded door that had been swung back on its powerful hinges in order to give du Brée passage through the heavy wall. Even as Edmond watched, the knight passed through the narrow portal, and the oaken door swung shut again, suddenly cutting off the lantern's amber-colored light.

For a time all was silence, and then from the wall above came the sound of voices and the rattle of armor and weapons as the party reached the ramparts. The sounds faded gradually as the group made its way along, while Edmond, appalled by these evidences of serious treachery, could only stand motionless and wonder.

His first idea was to return at once to Mont St. Michel, there to rouse the guard and denounce Sir Clément, but as the throbbing of his heart lessened somewhat, and he began to realize what might be the results of such an action, he saw how hopeless it would be. Sir Clément would return and immediately deny his story, and Edmond knew perfectly that to anyone in authority the word of a fisherman would be as naught against the word of a nobleman. He would merely be imprisoned for his pains, and would be tortured—either into an admission that his story was not true, or until he died on the rack. Furthermore, if, under the torture, he should say that his story was false, then there was very little likelihood that his punishment would be anything less than death at the hangman's hands.

Nor did he think it strange that, despite these dangers, he should continue in his attempt to find a way that would aid him to gain further information of Sir Clément's treachery. What he would do with the information he did not know, but that could wait. Once having talked the matter over with his father it might be that some way could be found. His business now was, obviously, to learn everything he could, and there was no way of learning more unless— His heart leaped into his throat again at the conclusion he was forced to reach. To learn more he must find a way to scale the walls that guarded Tombelaine—must somehow overhear what was even now going on somewhere within that enemy-filled stronghold.

But how could he gain entrance?

All about the island ran the walls—lower than those of Mont St. Michel, yes, but built to withstand the attack of an army. More than that, at intervals all about their tops were sentinels, awake and tramping up and down; he could even hear one occasionally as a pike clanged against the stone, or as a breastplate clashed gently in an embrasure. And, more than that, so dark

was the night that he could barely see his hand before his face. Still, that might be as much a help as a hindrance.

He walked silently up to the wall and felt of the stone. There were no cracks or roughened places that could be made to form even the most precarious of ways up to the top. Still, he remembered having climbed half-way up the wall of one of the turrets that stood on the eastern side of Mont St. Michel; he had done that by putting his back into the angle made by the tower and the wall that joined it, and by pushing with his hands and feet against the stone. Furthermore, he felt sure that he could have gone on up to the top had a guard not ordered him down.

There might be such a corner here in the wall on Tombelaine, and if so, he might somehow reach the top. Then, if St. Michael would but aid him, he might slip past the sentinel and so succeed. He did not pause to wonder how he might escape once more. Instead, he set out at once to search along the wall in the blackness.

For a quarter of an hour or more he made his way along, sometimes climbing up over masses of granite, sometimes walking along the sands that came up to the very foot of the wall. Around the western end of the island he made his way, and along its northern side. Once he was compelled to swim in the cold water for forty yards or so, where one section of the wall seemed to be built up directly from a deep pool left there by the tide. And now, having emerged from the water and followed the wall still further, good fortune finally favored him.

A gateway, closed and powerful, jutted ponderously forward from the wall—a gateway flanked by two squat and powerful towers, and there, in the sharp corner made by one of them with the wall, was piled a mass of ship's gear. In the darkness Edmond could not at first make out what was there, and then, to his delight, he felt a rope-draped spar standing on end in the

very corner of the wall. How far up it went he did not know, but what with the ropes that were wrapped about it, it would be easy to climb. His clothes were soaked from the swim he had taken, and he was shivering with cold, but after listening carefully, he decided to risk climbing that leaning spar.

It was surprisingly easy, and almost before he realized it, he had climbed up until he could feel the overhanging battlement immediately above his head. But he could go no further. Just above him as he clung to the spar, the battlement jutted out four feet from the wall, and he could not find even the slightest hold on the stone. He reached up and felt for the slot that was cut through from above in order to permit the defenders to pour boiling oil or to shoot arrows through onto the heads of any who, in an attack, should attempt to climb the wall as he was doing now. His hand went through one of the openings well enough, and he could even hold tightly by curving his fingers over its upper edge. But it was far too small to permit him to pass.

From some distance along the wall above him he heard the sound of a sentinel's footsteps, and he held on silently as the man approached. The fellow stopped for a moment, peering across the parapet into the blackness without realizing that almost beneath his very feet, and not more than a foot away through the heavy stone, the fisherboy clung silently. To Edmond the man seemed to stand there endlessly, but finally he moved on, his footsteps fading gradually away until hardly more than a whisper from them came to Edmond's intent ears.

What to do the boy could not imagine. To come so near to success and then to fail was more than he cared to consider. So, without thought of any real possibility of success, he felt about for the next slot through to the wall above. He found it in an instant, for, unlike its fellow, it was an opening two feet across and longer than it was wide. In the darkness Ed-

mond could not understand why that should be, but his fingers, searching about, showed him shortly that the stone that should have filled that space had been removed—perhaps to be replaced because it had cracked and partly fallen out. But whatever the reason, there lay a way to the wall.

Silently the boy passed one arm through and then the other, and slowly raised himself until his head and shoulders were above the level of the wall behind the raised parapet. He listened intently, and heard the sentinel returning. For a moment he remained where he was, but, as the guard approached, the boy lowered himself once more, wrapped his legs about the spar that had served him as a ladder, and waited. The guard passed slowly, continued for twenty steps and then returned. Again he leaned on the parapet for a time, and again passed on.

Now Edmond acted quickly. Up through the opening he swung himself. With a swift, silent struggle he raised his head and shoulders through the hole. Resting on his elbows he listened carefully for a moment, and hearing nothing, gave one final thrust with his toe against the spar below and swung himself upward until he sat with only his feet within the opening. But no sooner had he pushed against the spar than he realized his error, for as he pushed he felt it slide sideways—heard it rasp against the stone of the wall as it toppled slowly away from the corner. There was an instant's silence as the spar fell clear, and then came a crash and a reverberating boom as the heavy timber struck and rolled among the rocks below!

Sir Clément du Brée, having been taken in through the postern gate, was led by the captain of the guard along the ramparts. Climbing down from them they passed a huddle of huts that served as barracks for men-at-arms, and walked along a curving and climbing path that broke, now and then, into steep flights of steps. The man with the horn lantern went be-

fore, but the dim light showed little more than the irregularity of the way. They crossed a plaza along the side of which stood half a dozen huge and awkward bronze cannon—rare implements of war in those days—with heavy stone cannon-balls stacked in pyramidal piles nearby. A narrow, curving street led them between two rows of dark houses, and they came at last to another plaza beyond which du Brée could plainly see the heavy gateway that led through the north wall. The gate was closed, and built against the wall beside it, dark and ponderous in the shadows, stood a low stone house with a heavy arched entrance. In iron baskets, one of which hung on each side of the entrance, smoking, flaring wood fires glowed, casting a flickering red light over the roughly paved plaza, the heavy gateway, and the dark stone walls.

A guard, armed with pike and sword and buckler, stood at the entrance to the house, between the lights. As soon as he saw the captain of the guard and his companion approaching, he threw open a small door that was cut in the larger one that closed the arch. Without a word he permitted the two to pass.

Within the house du Brée found himself standing in a stone-floored passageway from which an open door led into a candle-lighted hall. Following the captain of the guard through this new way, he found himself at last in a large, rich, low-ceiled room that was dimly lighted by candles, and by the dying embers of a fire that, earlier in the evening, had been lighted in the cavernous fireplace to take the chill from the room.

The captain of the guard motioned du Brée to a seat.

"My lord abbot is asleep," he announced. "Wait, and I will call him."

Sir Clément sat down and stretched his feet out toward the embers that still smoldered among the white ashes on the hearth. It had been easier than he had imagined! Further-

more, his way back would be as easy, for there was no doubt that d'Estouteville and Prior Jean trusted him. He would tell them, of course, that a fleet had actually arrived, but that the ships were small and had brought no men—only a few supplies; that furthermore they were leaving again as soon as some repairs were made and the weather permitted. He could make up some story as to how he got the information, and in the meantime Robert Jolivet and the additional thousand men who had arrived—the captain of the guard had told him the number—would be able to make their plans for an attack on Mont St. Michel that would surely take the place.

The knight let a half-smile of pleasure flit over his face at the thought of what that would mean to him. Robert Jolivet would be once more the active head of the Abbey and the island of Mont St. Michel, and the prospect of the wealth, honor and position that would come to Clément du Brée was pleasant! He had been waiting a full year to follow the instructions given him by the abbot, for Jolivet's plans had matured more slowly than he had imagined they would. He chuckled to himself, too, to think how easy it had been, after Jolivet and he had matured their plan, to get the letter to Prior Jean from poor, half-witted King Charles VII. And what luck that that fisher-boy had been able to see the fleet and report it when the fog had prevented the guards on the walls from seeing it at all! Furthermore, the ruse that had enabled him to visit Tombelaine without having any suspicion attach to himself had been a stroke of genius.

For fifteen minutes or more he sat waiting, before he heard voices and then saw the abbot enter with the captain of the guard.

"Well, du Brée," cried Jolivet in French, as the knight leaped to his feet. "Our plan is going well, and you are prompt. How did you know that we had come? We tried our best to

see Mont St. Michel through the fog, but caught not a glimpse of it."

"Nor did we see you, my lord," replied du Brée. "But a fisherboy, fishing a mile or so distant from the mount, caught a glimpse of the fleet as the fog lifted for a moment, and came rowing madly in to tell of it. I made light of the matter, but when d'Estouteville seemed worried, I told him that I would come tonight in order to see whether or not a fleet had actually arrived."

"Then no one suspects you?"

Sir Clément laughed.

"Far from it," he boasted. "And I shall go back with a story that will make them rest even more quietly than they do now."

"Then let us sit and complete our plans," suggested the abbot.

On the wall Edmond, at the sound of the falling spar, had leaped frantically to his feet. Even before the timber had ceased rolling among the rocks below, he knew what a fearful predicament he was in. For a moment he thought of dropping through the hole by which he had reached the wall, but an instant's reflection showed him the futility of that. It was twenty feet down to the ground, and there, piled in the corner in which he would alight, was a shapeless mass of ships' tackle upon which, even if he did not impale himself, he would create such a sound as would turn the whole guard out upon him immediately.

If only he could see! There must be *some* place nearby where he could hide. Yet, if he could see, then so could the guards whose footsteps he heard even now as they ran toward him along the wall.

He leaped to the parapet that lined the inner side of the wall

and felt about in the darkness, and as he did so a faint breeze fanned the scent of smoke across his face. He sniffed again. There must be a chimney nearby. If only he could find it!

A guard called out in the night, and another answered. One of them was within twenty feet. No longer could the boy wait—whether or not he had a plan, he must *act!* He swung himself over the inner parapet and hung there for a moment. He felt silently about with his feet, but there was nothing within reach. What lay below him in the darkness he did not know, nor did he know how high the wall was, there on its inner side, to the top of which he clung. By now, too, a guard had reached the angle in the wall, and had thrust himself half-way out through an embrasure that overlooked the outside. Still Edmond swung silently there in the dark. And then, bounding up a stairway in the wall, came another guard, bearing a lighted torch in his hand. For an instant its light shone down upon the boy as the guard dashed for the embrasure, and in that moment Edmond saw that, ten or a dozen feet to his left along the wall, a roof abutted against it—the roof of a low stone building. That roof would be within reach of his feet if only he could move sideways so far, and it might serve as a sanctuary.

Already his fingers, cold and stiff as they were, found it difficult to support his weight, for he could cling only to the heavy edge of the parapet. Yet move he must, even at the risk of falling.

He made the attempt, and all but slipped straightway. He dared not loose one hand, for if he did the other could not hold him. A finger at a time was all that he dared move—no more than that! And a dozen feet to go!

By now half a score of guards were crowded together in the outer embrasure within ten feet of the struggling boy. A blazing torch had been thrown down to the rocks outside in order to light the base of the wall, but search as they would in that small

lighted area they could see nothing save the fallen spar that had brought them running.

Edmond had managed to move six inches in the direction he wished to go. His fingers still had only the irregular corner of the cut stone to grasp, but he struggled on. One finger at a time he moved—then another and another. He was fearful of a fall to the darkness below—darkness that contained he knew not what. And as he struggled he overheard the shouting guards, but could gather little of what they said, for he knew no English.

On he went, and on—a foot was passed, and finally another. And then he overheard a remark that he understood, for someone had spoken in his native tongue.

" 'Twas but the spar that fell," a voice explained. "It was propped in the corner, for I saw it there before the gate was closed."

A rapid rush of unintelligible words followed, and another guard with a new torch arrived.

By now Edmond had gone full half-way to the goal he had chosen, but his fingers were losing their strength. He paused to rest, but to pause was still to hang from his tiring fingers. He was forced on. And now the guards were examining the hole through which he had reached the wall—were holding their torch about its edges and pointing. Had they but raised their torch and looked behind them along the top of that inner parapet, they would have seen—even from where they stood—his tortured fingers painfully weaving their slow way along.

On the boy struggled and on, his fingers failing little by little. Four feet more—three feet, and one hand slipped. He tried to regain his hold, and barely managed to succeed. But almost instantly the worn fingers slipped again. He made one last desperate effort, and missed. His body swung sideways as he gripped fiercely with the failing fingers of the other

hand. He reached out toward the roof with his foot, and touched it with his toe. For a moment his foot held on, and then swung clear. Once more he swung, and touched the roof again. This time his toe held, and summoning all his strength, he once more caught the coping of the wall with both hands, struggling along it madly. His hands slipped and he threw himself clear, to find—quite suddenly—that he was standing with shaking knees upon the narrow, stone coping that marked the edge of the roof.

For a moment his relief was so great that he failed to listen to the guards on the wall. And then, once more, he heard a sentence in his own tongue.

"Aha!" cried the same voice that had spoken before. "See? Someone whose clothes were wet has rested here. See? 'Tis plain. And now, where did he go?"

Edmond stood aghast. They knew that he was within the walls! It was only a matter of time before they would find him. In another moment they would trace him across the wall, and then—well, perhaps they would end it quickly with an arrow from one of their terrible bows.

For an instant he stood merely waiting, but suddenly he knew that he must make a final effort. The chimney—it must be near!

He turned about, and vaguely made out in the darkness a darker shape within six feet of him. He stepped carefully toward it and put out his hand. It was warm!

His strength seemed suddenly to return, and he stepped closer. He reached to its top and pulled himself up. Over the edge he swung, and let himself down inside, holding his arms over the edge. If the guards approached, he could thus drop down inside a little way, gripping the sooty walls with his arms and his legs. If they came no closer he could hang thus with his head and shoulders outside. It was as well, too, for though

very little smoke was coming up, still, were he forced to remain within the chimney, he might be choked. He hung there and listened.

On the wall the guards were still talking. They had followed his wet trail across the wall, and had found where he had swung over. They held the torch over, and Edmond lowered himself a little more within the chimney. He listened carefully but could not make out their words. He raised himself again; they had left the wall and were trooping down the stairs, evidently under the impression that he had leaped within the wall. That was as well. He could try, now, to find some other place in which to hide.

But the thought had hardly come to him before it left as suddenly, for seemingly from beneath his very feet he heard a voice.

"Well, du Brée," it said. *"Our plan is going well, and you are prompt. How did you know that we had come? We tried our best to see Mont St. Michel through the fog, but caught not a glimpse of it."*

Edmond hung breathlessly silent, listening eagerly for the response, and then, faintly, but as clearly as though it had been spoken directly to him, came du Brée's reply.

CHAPTER FIVE

ON ROOF AND WALL

For the moment, Edmond knew, he was safe. The soldiers were scurrying about in the dark passages behind the building in the chimney of which he had taken refuge, and by glancing over the soot-blackened top he could occasionally catch glimpses of them as, with flaring torches and bared weapons, they poked in odd corners, and talked excitedly. Satisfied that they were not likely to look for him on the roof, he took a deep breath of clean air, and once more lowered himself slightly within the chimney, where fortunately a marked irregularity in the flue made it possible for him to rest his feet against one side while he leaned, not too uncomfortably, against the other.

The thin smoke of the dying fire below crept past, but it bore with it more warm air than choking gas, and he was glad to be able to toast his chilled and still wet body. And all the time from below came the sound of voices—one of which he recognized so clearly as du Brée's.

In that moment during which the hidden boy had looked to make certain that he was safe, he had lost the thread of the conversation that was taking place in the room below, but he caught its drift again immediately.

"Nay, my lord abbot," he heard du Brée protest. "The walls are more than strong enough. They cannot be overthrown. You should know that, for you built most of them."

Edmond frowned. Here was du Brée talking to some lord abbot who, apparently, had built part of the walls at Mont St.

Michel. Who could "my lord abbot" be, here on Tombelaine? And then the other man answered, while Edmond strained his ears to hear.

"Yes, I built them," came the voice, "and built them far too well. How many men have you to defend them?"

"Fourteen-score," replied du Brée, "or mayhap a dozen more than that."

"And d'Estouteville?" asked the abbot. "What of him?"

"I like him not," admitted du Brée. "But he is a good captain, for all that. His men, perhaps, have somewhat less stomach for a fight than they had yesteryear, yet will they obey him—yes, and fight for him."

"Then you believe that with all our thousands we cannot breach the walls?"

"No one can breach them."

"But we have these strange new cannon," added the abbot. "They are fearful weapons."

"I know naught of cannon," admitted du Brée, "save that the use of them is considered unchivalrous and not according to the usages of warfare."

"Unchivalrous!" growled the abbot disparagingly. "What care I for *chivalry?* If cannon will breach the walls and bring me back to rule once more at Mont St. Michel, then shall I use them. And who are you to speak of chivalry? 'Tis unchivalrous, methinks, to do as you are doing now, yet—"

"Take care, my lord abbot!" cried du Brée.

"Tut, tut!" replied the abbot. "Wait until I have finished. 'Tis unchivalrous, as you well know, but 'twill make your position the stronger when you have aided us to win our way to Mont St. Michel again. Sir Clément du Brée can thus become captain of the guard. Is there any other way in which he is likely to reach that position?"

" 'Tis not overmuch to offer for the risks I take," growled

du Brée. "More might well be added without making the reward too great."

"More *shall* be added," promised the abbot. "When Robert Jolivet rules once more at Mont St. Michel, Clément du Brée is to be captain of the guard; that much is settled. Now all that remains is to find a fortune for him. Is that what you mean?"

" 'Tis overly blunt," replied du Brée, "but it will serve."

"Very well," agreed the abbot. "Lady Claire du Val is there, is she not?"

Du Brée flushed. "Yes," he admitted.

Jolivet laughed. "Well—there is your fortune!"

"Lady Claire is less friendly than she might be," commented du Brée.

The abbot's voice grew cold.

"What is Lady Claire's friendliness?" he growled. "When I have come to Mont St. Michel once more I shall deal with her. *I* can give you Lady Claire, and with her goes her fortune. I know of no other that is to be had more readily. But enough of this. I would talk of more weighty matters. How are we to come within the walls of the mount?"

For a moment all was silence in the room below, and Edmond, somewhat cramped within the chimney, eased his position a little. Smeared from head to foot as he was, with the soot from the chimney, he failed to realize that with every move he made some of the black stuff drifted downward into the fireplace, and now, with this last move, a great clot of it, that had collected in the jog of the flue where his feet rested, softly detached itself and fell silently into the fire a dozen feet below.

"What have you in your chimney, my lord?" asked du Brée suddenly. "Ever since you entered, soot has been sifting down."

"Chimney-swifts," grunted the abbot. "How are we to capture the mount?"

"There is but one way," replied du Brée.

"Starvation?"

"Certainly," admitted the knight. "Nor will it take overlong. Draw your lines close about the mount. Food comes every day from the mainland, and food comes every day from the sea. Put a stop to that—and the mount must surrender in a month."

For fifteen minutes or more they continued to talk. So vastly important was all this, and so vitally did it bear upon the welfare of his island home, that it seemed to Edmond, in his excitement, that his very heart-beats must be audible to everyone within arrow-shot. He dared not move lest more soot fall, and his position was growing momentarily more difficult to bear. But cramped though he was, and tempted though he was to cough now and again as the faint smoke crept past him, he held himself tensely motionless, listening. Finally he was rewarded.

"I must get me gone," said du Brée at last. "In another hour or so the tide will come, and I have no desire to wait until morning and have d'Estouteville see me coming from Tombelaine."

"Then go," replied Jolivet. "But come again, in the same manner. The guards will watch for you. Then you can tell us how well our campaign goes."

Edmond heard the two rise, and heard their voices growing fainter as they walked the length of the room. A door slammed faintly after a little time, and then all was still. No further sound came to his ears. For an endless time—ten long minutes, perhaps—the boy remained silent in the chimney. Still no sound, and he determined to risk a move.

Carefully he pressed his elbows against the chimney wall.

He lifted one of his feet and then the other from the corner in which they had been thrust. He reached up in order to lay hold of the chimney top. He felt about and caught hold of a rough place in the wall. Another move, and he slipped. For a moment he maintained his hold, but suddenly—sickeningly—the dried mortar that supported him gave way. He felt himself drop swiftly. The heated air in the chimney was filled with a black cloud of flying soot. He clawed at the walls, and only served to scratch more soot free. Then, with a resounding crash, the boy lit on his feet in the midst of the coals in the fireplace. Sparks shot in every direction—some of them halfway across the room. It was almost as if there had been an explosion there on the hearth. Ashes, sparks, soot, and smoke erupted prodigiously into the room, and Edmond's first glimpse from the fireplace, through the cloud of his own making, was of an amazed and frightened churchman, leaping to his feet from the depths of a comfortable chair before the fire. For an instant the man stared in wild and superstitious terror at the indistinct and blackened figure standing there in the cloud of smoke and dust that still billowed forth into the room.

Edmond, fearful as he was, knew that the person he faced was human. The abbot, superstitious—as was everyone of his time—and horror-stricken at the sight he beheld, had not the slightest doubt that the black and fearful creature that stared forth from that cloud of smoke was nothing less than a demon from the very depths of Hell! For a moment he could not move, so paralyzed with fright was he. And Edmond, against whose worn woolen shoe a dull red coal was burning, suddenly felt the heat against his unprotected foot. Partly from pain, partly from fright, and partly from a determination to sell his life as dearly as he could, he leaped from the fireplace, and even as he leaped he shrieked aloud!

Now no longer was the abbot paralyzed. This *was* a demon!

With a bellow of fright he turned, picked up the skirt of his rich robe, and fled. Through the open door at the end of the room he ran, turning into the hall beyond and shouting as he went.

Edmond paused tensely to listen, and heard a door slam. Then, faintly, outside the building, he heard excited voices. Suddenly he knew that though for the moment he had saved himself from that one person, it was at the expense of rousing all the thousands of fierce fighting men housed within the walls of Tombelaine.

It was vital, too, that he escape—vital not merely for himself. His life, he knew, meant little save to himself and to his father. But the Abbey and the town from which he had come were in grave danger, and only he knew of it. He must escape!

The chances were all against him. But he realized that what the abbot had by this time reported was no mere fisherboy. Edmond, as superstitious as others of his day, realized perfectly that, if *he* had seen a soot-besmeared creature drop suddenly into the embers of his fireplace, accompanied by so terrific a cloud of soot and smoke, he too, would have been certain that a demon had materialized! But he knew, too, that while no one was likely to come dashing into that room, after hearing the abbot's story, someone would come some time, and that time might be soon. It behooved him to set about making his effort to escape—whatever that effort was to be.

He knew too little of Tombelaine to risk any of the streets or passages—he did not, for that matter, know how to reach them. He dared not open a single door, lest some armed man be standing there—fearful of the reported demon, perhaps, but willing to make some sort of attempt, at the abbot's bidding, to overcome the invader. And any attempt, of course, would be successful, for Edmond was not armed.

Not armed! The very thought of arms caused him to cast his

eyes quickly about the room. There on its rack against the wall hung a magnificently damascened suit of armor. Edmond's practical eye passed this by; alone, one could not dress himself in that armor in less than half an hour, nor could he move readily should he ever manage to get it on. But beside it—ah! *there* was something worth the having. A sword! The boy leaped for it. In a moment he had unwrapped the belt that was wound round the scabbard, had swung it at his hip and bound the belt about him. Outside the door beyond the hall he could hear the shouting of men—a crowd of men. Though none of them seemed willing as yet to enter, they *might* enter at any minute. He must go.

He looked about him. There were other doors, but whither they led he knew not. The only road he knew led up the chimney and on to the roof. From there, if only St. Michael would still aid him, he might escape by way of the wall once more.

He looked within the huge fireplace, and his heart fell. It was so huge that the place where its chimney began was beyond his reach. He looked about and saw the chair in which the abbot had been seated. In an instant he had seized it and pulled it into the fireplace. He did not heed the fact that its draperies trailed among the embers. Instead, he leaped upon it, climbed to its arms—its back—and from there swung himself within the black hole above. The sword hampered him, but he wormed his way up, pressing with knees—elbows—hands—his back, his feet—even with his head. A foot at a time he progressed, his breath coming fast. No longer could he hear the men outside the building. As yet, he knew, they had not entered the room below him. Up and up he climbed. His hand found the corner in which his feet had been wedged before. He drew a breath of relief. He was tired, and the smoke in the chimney was all but overpowering. Still he struggled on. His feet were in that corner now. Another effort and he would

reach the top. But the smoke—it was thick. How could that be?

He suddenly felt a terrific blast of heat, and the black flue was lighted by a flaring flame from below.

The chair was on fire!

One last effort. His hand was at the chimney's top. Up he swung and for a moment sat on the edge. Then, carefully lifting his precious sword over, he let himself silently down to the roof outside, and paused to breathe.

His knees were weak. His breath was coming fast. His whole body was aquiver with fatigue and excitement. While he took a dozen breaths he stood there, and suddenly heard voices faintly. He pricked up his ears. Where was the sound? He listened eagerly, and then once more raised himself to the chimney-top. Smoke was pouring out, now, and heat, so he dared not hold his head there; but vaguely from below, and intermingled with the crackling of the flames, came the sound of a score of excited voices. Edmond smiled grimly and slid back to the roof. He must rest for a moment, lest he be too weak to go on. Furthermore, while he was resting he could watch the wall and see whether it was clear.

He sat down and leaned against the chimney. All about him the darkness was intense, yet vaguely he could make out the blackness of the heavy rampart not a dozen feet away. And as he listened he could hear the measured pace of a sentinel as he walked back and forth—perhaps the very sentinel who had come running when the spar had crashed. If it were the same man, he would certainly be watchful. To pass him would take more than ordinary care.

Edmond sat silent until the sentinel had reached the end of his beat and had marched back again. Then, slipping from his seat, the boy stole along the roof, to where it was built against the wall. He stood there until the guard had returned

and marched back once more. Having listened for a time to the retreating footsteps he reached up to the parapet, and swung himself up to the wall again.

And now his most serious problem awaited him.

It was all but impossible to slip through the hole by which he had entered, and drop safely to the ground below. In itself the long drop was dangerous, and tackle and spars lay in heaps there. It was all but certain that to attempt such a thing was to break his leg—or his neck. Yet he knew no other way down.

He stood still in the darkness, listening, and trying at the same time to plan. The sentinel was approaching once more. Something must be done. To pass the man in the darkness was practically impossible. Yet what else was there to be done? He must try, and must try soon, for to his ears came faintly the sound of the excited search within the house.

Four times, now, he had heard the sentinel pass along that section of the wall, and each time the fellow had kept well to the outside edge. If only he would do so again, it might be possible to escape detection by lying against the inner parapet while the fellow marched unwittingly past at a distance of six feet or so. It was a dangerous plan, of course, but it might succeed. And if it failed—

His sword! He had all but forgotten that, for he was unaccustomed to swords.

He heard the sentinel's footsteps coming closer, and softly pulled the sword from its scabbard. Then, with the utmost caution, he stooped beside the inside parapet. To lie down might be to make himself a little more nearly invisible, but if he did so he would be unable to leap very rapidly to his feet. Stooped, thus, he need not rise, and if the guard detected him, he could swing, mightily, with his sword gripped in both his sinewy hands. And then—

Suddenly he remembered that he had had to swim past one section of the wall, which seemed to have been built directly up from a deep tide-pool. If only he could reach that section of the wall, he might leap into the water and swim across it to the sands, where, he felt certain, he could elude a thousand men in the darkness.

(He could hear the sentinel, now, hardly a dozen paces distant.)

But where was that section of the wall? There was a turret, he remembered, around which he had had to swim, and having passed it, he had come upon some rocks over which he had clambered, following the straight wall for a way, and coming— Ah! He had it now. There had been only a long, straight section of wall between where he had had to swim and the place where he had found the spar up which he had climbed. Could he but pass this guard, then he might be able to make his way unmolested to the next turret which, perhaps, marked the end of this sentinel's post.

The approaching man-at-arms was within a step or two. He was walking slowly, but even in the darkness Edmond could make out his head and shoulders—could even see the pike he carried upright in his hand. Two more steps and he would be past! One more! But the man paused. Edmond could not tell whether or not the fellow was looking toward him. Then he saw the pike change its position, and in an instant felt its butt against his ribs as the guard made a tentative investigation of the shapeless blur before him.

Instantly Edmond leaped. With all the fierce strength of his powerful body he swung his sword. Held in both hands it hissed viciously through its long arc, and with a shower of sparks crashed brazenly upon the guard's steel cap.

Down in a lump the fellow fell, his armor clashing gently on the stone, and Edmond, leaping forward almost as his blow

came home, was instantly dashing headlong toward the next turret.

His ears were intent upon every sound. He heard the loud shouts of the searchers in the house as they poured out to search the neighborhood. But, strangely, the crash of his sword upon the guard's steel cap and the fellow's collapse upon the wall had seemed to attract no one. Still, the boy did not know when he would come upon another guard, and so ran with his sword point out before him. For forty yards he ran—fifty. Then, suddenly, his eyes made out, within ten feet, another guard.

Even in the darkness Edmond could see that the fellow's pike was leveled.

To pass was impossible. But now the boy's mind was working rapidly. He stopped immediately.

"Help!" he cried. "My lord abbot requires help. The devil himself appeared before my lord in a flash of smoke and flame. Go to him. I must rouse the guard."

The astonished sentinel lowered his pike in amazement, and without another word Edmond dashed past, shouting now at the top of his voice.

"Go to my lord abbot's aid!" he cried. "It's by his command. Aid for my lord abbot!"

It mattered little that his language was French. Half of the men who had come with Jolivet were Burgundian and Norman mercenaries, while others there were from Gascony. French was almost as much spoken as English on Tombelaine. And as he fled, still shouting, Edmond suddenly saw before him the turret for which he was searching. Out to its farthest edge he ran, unbuckling his sword-belt as he did so. In another moment he was leaning through an embrasure, the more clearly to make out whether or not water was below him. He listened for a moment, though cries from everywhere now came clearly

to his ears. But even above the shouts he could hear the water lapping against the stone below him. Over the edge he swung himself, hung for an instant and dropped. A moment in the air, and then the cold water closed about him. He brought himself quickly to the surface, and struck out sturdily away from the wall.

For twenty strokes he swam, and felt the sand beneath him. He rose to his feet and strode out upon it. From the wall he could hear shouts and cries from a score of men. In the excitement even the sound of the splash he had made seemed to have been lost, and as he rounded the western end of Tombelaine, where perforce he had to clamber over the rocks close under the walls in order to escape the quicksands, he smiled, for from within the walls he still heard the shouts of those who were trying to pursue him, and he realized that they still believed him to be somewhere within those sturdy ramparts!

CHAPTER SIX

THE SKIRMISH ON THE BEACH

THE darkness was still intense when Edmond reached his boat once more. From within the walls came not the slightest sound, and only the faint and measured tramping of a guard upon the rampart reached the boy's ears as he climbed into his boat, to lie at full length and try to rest after his adventure. While still he had been a long way out upon the sands he had heard the roar of the drawbridge as it had been lowered for du Brée; and more faintly he had heard the regular clank of the ratchets on the pulleys as it had been raised again. Thus he knew that du Brée was safe within the walls once more, and he surmised that the knight was even now making some long and untruthful report of what had happened.

He tried to go to sleep, but his mind was seething—with du Brée's treachery—with Jolivet's presence on Tombelaine—with his adventure on the wall, in the chimney, and in the dimly lighted room. He could not sleep.

He tried to decide what he should do with the startling information he had obtained. He thought of taking it directly to Sir Louis d'Estouteville, but he knew that Sir Louis would immediately confront him with du Brée—that du Brée would instantly and arrogantly deny every word of it—would demand the boy's punishment for thus questioning the honor of a nobleman and a knight. Furthermore, he knew what that punishment was likely to be. He would be thrust into one of the dungeons that lay deep within the rock foundations of the Abbey.

He would be tortured. The rack—the thumbscrew—the boot—other fearful implements would be set to work dislocating his joints, crushing his fingers and his feet. Before such awful treatment what would he do? Would he maintain his story stoutly until his arms and legs were crushed beyond use, as he had seen the arms and legs of men who had been through that ghastly treatment? Or would he give way before the horrible pain and admit that what he had said was untrue after all?

There was little hope in either case. If he maintained the truth of his account he might ultimately gain his freedom, but only at the expense of a torture-wrecked body. Should he fail before the pain and say that his story was not true, he would be handed over to the hangman's calloused hands, and beneath the very gallows on which Jean, the unfortunate carpenter, had died, he too would be hanged—a spectacle of horror for all his friends to see.

His mind was filled with thoughts as trying and as difficult as these, and as he lay there in the bottom of his little boat, the eastern sky paled faintly with the coming of the dawn. Slowly the blackness turned to gray, and a faint morning breeze, wandering over the sands, fanned away the mists that had lain there through the night. Overhead the higher winds of heaven slowly broke the clouds that had covered all the sky, and through the widening rifts a star sparkled palely here and there, only to fade as the dawn came, and to disappear before the coming of the sun.

The eastern sky turned faintly primrose, and slowly turned to pink. A sunbeam suddenly shot across the rocky coast of Normandy and struck full upon the statue of St. Michael where it stood upon the very apex of the Abbey's slender spire. Edmond, from his boat, watched that militantly armored figure high above him—watched it as a cloud slid past it, leaving the pale blue sky of early morning as its background. Dressed in

full armor the bronze figure stood, his wings outspread, his feet trampling on the dragon of evil, his avenging sword aloft and poised for a blow.

To the boy in the boat that bronze figure was far more than a man-made symbol. It stood for all that he and his fellows held most dear—for the Church to which all Christendom bowed down—for the feudal state without which, in the minds of the people of the day, the very world could not exist. St. Michael was in some strange way almost a god of peace and of war combined—of the peace that lay within the Abbey that that figure crowned—of the war that for so long had been a part of every layman's life that no one could imagine the world without it.

And now across the sands the tide lay undulating. For seven miles it had already run, and now was lapping at the beach upon which lay the boat that shielded Edmond. The sun had risen clear of the horizon. The sands were covered with the waters of the sea. The guards within the gatehouse opened wide the heavy gate, raised the iron portcullis, and released the heavy drawbridge; slowly it came down across the moat, to permit the fishermen of Mont St. Michel to drag their boats once more down to the tide.

Until a dozen or more fishermen had come out through the heavy arch, had crossed the drawbridge, and had busied themselves about their boats, Edmond lay still in the bottom of his little craft. He had no desire to attract attention, for he was streaked with soot—his clothes were still sodden—and even a casual observer would have known that he had not come forth from the town since the opening of the gate. Had a guard decided to question him he could hardly avoid incriminating himself. So he remained hidden until, the others being busy at some distance from him, he decided to get out, hurriedly prepare his boat, and launch it on the tide.

By good fortune he slid his boat into the water, shoved it out, and had already rowed a score of strokes before anyone took notice of him; even then it was only another fisherman wishing him good-morning. Nor did another boat pass near him all the time he was rowing toward his favorite fishing grounds.

The sun had risen now, and Edmond was far enough away from the others to feel safe in taking off his wet and soot-blackened clothes. He washed them as best he could, wrung them out and spread them about the boat to dry. And for half an hour he scrubbed himself with the salty water of the bay, pulling in a fish now and then when it tugged too impulsively on a line, but giving far less time to fishing than to ridding himself as best he could of the signs of his adventure of the preceding night.

For three hours he stayed out on the tide, his clothes finally drying to the point where he could don them. With only a dozen fish to show that he had been at work, but with the soot stains fairly well eliminated, he thrust out his oars and slowly made his way back to his island home, eager to see his father and to tell him of his experiences, though unwilling to fall in with any talkative fisherman who might still see enough betraying soot marks to cause him to ask questions.

The tide had ebbed some way before the boy grounded his boat, and the other fishermen had hauled their boats out before he followed them. Still keeping his distance from the few others on the beach, he made his boat fast to its ring in the wall, and with his basket of fish held before him he walked as casually as he could across the drawbridge and through the gate.

Again good fortune favored him. The guards were busily engaged in arguing some fine point in martial matters as Edmond passed, and they gave him no more than a casual glance.

Within the dingy room that he and his son called home, Arnaud had accomplished little. All night he had prayed for the

safety of his son, or had slept fitfully in his chair. He had tried, since he had first heard the sounds of the fishermen as they had trooped out through the gate when it was opened, to imagine what could possibly have happened to Edmond. He had not expected him, of course, until the gate was opened, but then, when he did not come, the crippled man grew nervous and impatient. He knew that if anything had happened that had come to the ears of the other fishermen, some one of them would certainly have carried the news to him at once. But in his uncertainty, he imagined a hundred terrible tragedies that might have occurred without coming to the knowledge of any of his acquaintances. For three hours or more he waited, the prey of fearful possibilities—doubting, fearing, but more fearful still of asking anyone about his son, lest he do some irreparable damage to the cause of Mont St. Michel.

Thus it was that he was tense and eager as he heard fisherman after fisherman returning after fishing on the tide—returning through the King's Gate and greeting his friends in the street. Voice after voice he recognized, but none came in to see him. They would do that later, he knew, for they always came in some time during the day. But just now they were busy with their catches. Then, quite suddenly, he knew that Edmond had come. A dog barked sharply in the street outside—the same half-grown puppy that Edmond had heard the night before as he lay in his boat in the darkness. In reply to the dog's impetuous and friendly greeting came Edmond's voice.

"Down, Varec!" he cried. "Down! Pierre must feed you this morning. I have other duties."

Arnaud gripped the arms of his chair tensely, and half-raised himself on his crippled legs. The door swung open, and Edmond, still carrying his basket of fish, spoke once more to the dog and entered.

"My son!" cried Arnaud. "My son! Tell me, quickly—"

"Yes, Father," replied Edmond. "At once. I have much to tell, but fishing was not so good this morning as it might have been."

He placed the basket on the floor, and came closer to his father.

"We must take care," he whispered. "No one must overhear."

Arnaud sank back into his chair, nodding his head.

"Yes," he admitted. "We must take care. But whisper your news to me. I have not slept all night."

For the better part of an hour Edmond sat whispering to his father—stopped now and then by a question—repeating now and then some detail that he had not made clear. Arnaud still gripped the arms of his chair, his mind awhirl with the significance of his son's account. Sir Clément du Brée a traitor to the town that trusted him! Robert Jolivet plotting there on Tombelaine! New plans afoot for the capture of Mont St. Michel!

"They have these strange new cannon there on Tombelaine?" asked Arnaud.

"So I heard the abbot say," replied Edmond.

"I'm told that they are fearful weapons," whispered his father. "And tell me: how many men came with the ships?"

"I know not," admitted the boy. "They did not say. I only know that they had hoped to breach the walls, and that there are thousands of men there."

Arnaud nodded.

"And you say that Jolivet promises that my lord du Brée is to be captain of the guard when Mont St. Michel is taken?"

"Ay," nodded Edmond, "and more than that. The abbot is to give him Lady Claire du Val in marriage as a further payment!"

Arnaud raised his eyebrows in surprise.

"Lady Claire," he repeated. "That indeed would be a payment!"

For a moment both of them fell silent. Arnaud could not decide what to propose. He knew, as well as Edmond did, that Sir Louis d'Estouteville and the vicar-general would disbelieve the boy's story—or at least challenge it; and he knew, too, the vengeance that would descend upon Edmond if the story were told. No, the story must not be told—to any one—until the two of them had irrefutable evidence. There lay the difficulty—how to get it!

The late afternoon tide swept in across the sands, and Edmond went forth to fish, while Arnaud still sat in his chair, his brow seamed with thought. That so grave a danger faced Mont St. Michel was, of course, the most important fact that Edmond had obtained, but he and his father would have been less than human had they not been troubled by the conspirators' plan involving Lady Claire du Val. It is true that she had been a resident of Mont St. Michel for only a few months, after the English, on a foray from Avranches, had swept down upon Castle du Val, which stood across the Selune River from Le Val St. Pair. Luckily a faithful servant had been able to bear word of the coming attack to Lady Claire and her mother, with the result that the castle was deserted by family and retainers alike a good hour before the English army appeared. The family retainers scattered over the countryside, seeking protection where they could, while Lady Claire and the Countess, together with a few servants, rode post-haste through Ceaux and Servon to Beauvoir, and from there made their way beside the Couesnon to the sands of the Bay of St. Michel, across two miles of which they traveled up to the gate of the island city.

Many of the family's valuables were lost, of course, in that English raid, and many were the chests and tapestries and other rich household belongings that fell into the attackers' hands.

But thanks to the word of warning, Lady Claire and her mother were able to bring with them from Castle du Val seven pack-horses laden heavily with gold and silver plate, with chests of jewels and money, and with those other rich collections that were a part of the family's wealth.

Furthermore, though a hundred and fifty miles of enemy-infested country lay between Castle du Val and the great Castle of Loches, three messengers, each traveling by a different route, had set out to make their way through to that powerful structure where weak King Charles VII spent more than a little of his time, in order to bear the news of Lady Claire's misfortune to her uncle—the brother of her dead father—the Count de la Perche. Thus Lady Claire and her mother would find safety at Mont St. Michel until the Count could send, or go himself, to take the women to those safer portions of France which lay to the south of the River Loire.

But though two of the three messengers had reached the Count de la Perche a good two months before (the other honest fellow was never heard from again from the time he spurred through the gate of the Castle du Val), the Count had not been able, as yet, to send for his noble kinswomen. The result was that Lady Claire, who had turned her seventeenth birthday a full six-month earlier and considered herself a young lady grown, had had time to get acquainted with Mont St. Michel and most of its inhabitants.

Prior Jean, of course, had welcomed her and her mother and had found a house for them well up the island's steep and rocky side, a house with a tiny garden hardly larger than Lady Claire's own bedroom. It stood within a stone's throw of the Abbey barbican, hardly forty yards from the great North Tower, and from its windows Lady Claire could see out across the roofs below, across the ramparts below them, and finally across the sands, clear to Castle du Val itself, although only on

the clearest of days could she make out the walls and turrets and conical roofs that marked her former home.

For a week or two the young lady had been content to look out across the sands, to read and sew and embroider. But finally she felt the strain of staying within the little house. At Castle du Val she had gone forth almost every day to ride about the countryside—to carry her hawk upon her wrist and fly him at grouse or heron. But at Mont St. Michel she could not do such things, for it was not safe upon the sands, and upon the mainland the English were too far likely to be encountered. So she turned to other things, and soon found more than enough to occupy her attention.

At Castle du Val there had been many retainers, of course, and outside the castle walls two score of thatched huts sheltered the serfs who tilled the surrounding fields. These people were all poor, of course, for everyone in France was poor except the nobility and the burghers of the walled towns. Still, the poor who dwelt about Castle du Val were fortunate. They might be clad in patched and ragged garments. They might be called upon to work from dawn to dusk. Yet they were well fed. They were warm. And though no luxury ever fell into their calloused hands, still they had enough to keep them well and strong.

But at Mont St. Michel Lady Claire found things very different indeed. The monks of the Abbey, of course, were comfortable and well fed, and, though they personally possessed nothing, their Abbey was one of the wealthiest in all France. The men-at-arms, too, were fed and housed and clothed well, and were, in addition, paid. The officials of the place were wealthy, of course, and certain shopkeepers and burghers had enough gold in their coffers to protect them from the pinch of poverty.

But the laborers and the fishermen—the common people of

the little city—were far less fortunate. Little work was being done within the walls, and the laborers rarely found an opportunity to earn a penny. The fishermen could no longer go far away to fish, lest they be set upon by the English and slain at once or led to Tombelaine, there to be hanged brutally upon that island's gibbets.

Thus it was that Lady Claire found more than a little to do, going from door to door down in that section of the town that was piled upon the hillside near the King's Gate. Many a family did she find trying to eke out a living on such food as dogs might turn away from. And never did such a family fail to profit from her visits. She found work for them if they were strong; food was forthcoming if they were not. And on one occasion Lady Claire suddenly decided to build a new stone wall about her garden so that certain stonemasons and laborers who were out of work might for a time earn the livelihood they needed.

In her wanderings among the poor of the town, it was only natural that she should come upon crippled Arnaud. Lady Claire saw instantly the signs of need, and set herself busily to planning a way to aid the broken fisherman, but plan though she would, no method could she originate of aiding Arnaud and his son. Charity they would not accept. There was no work that she could get for Arnaud, while Edmond already worked full hard enough to earn the little upon which he and his father subsisted.

But though Lady Claire was unable to help the two, she did not lose her interest in them, and admired them the more for the sturdiness that made them refuse her proffered aid. It was not always so. More than a few of those to whom she went were eager for her charity. But neither Edmond nor his father ever dreamed of accepting it, though they—together with most of the rest of the town—would have laid down their

very lives for Lady Claire, whose bright smile and laughing eyes had seemed, within a month, to put new life and hope into the poor of Mont St. Michel.

It was because of this that Edmond and Arnaud had been more than a little perturbed at the thought of the plan that du Brée and Jolivet had announced—the plan of forcing Lady Claire into a marriage with the treacherous knight. And though both Arnaud and Edmond spent most of their spare time endeavoring to figure out some plan that would frustrate the treachery of du Brée, they talked more than a little of the dangers and the difficulties that awaited Lady Claire in the event of the success of du Brée's tremendous treachery.

That Lady Claire was only temporarily a resident of Mont St. Michel both Edmond and his father knew. That she was waiting as patiently as she could for word from the Count de la Perche was common knowledge in the little city. That she might leave the island any time to journey far away was known to all, but while she stayed within those heavy city walls, Edmond and Arnaud, together with a hundred others, were more than willing to guard her interests above their own—to see to her safety before they saw to theirs—to guard her, even at the cost of death itself, from any dangers that might threaten her. And not a single dwelling was there on the island but seemed the brighter and the happier for the presence of the black eyes, the pink cheeks, the dark hair and the slender form of generous Lady Claire.

For a week after his return from Tombelaine Edmond pondered the problem that had so suddenly confronted him, and with Arnaud, tried day after day to decide upon some course of action. Tide after tide swept in across the sands, and called for the boy to go forth in his boat to fish. Sometimes his luck was good, and sometimes not so good, but it seemed to Edmond that whether he worked or rested, rowed across

the waters or tramped about the island on the sands, his problem was always with him. And more than that, he could see signs of Jolivet's plan to draw the siege more closely about Mont St. Michel. Not a day passed but what some band of English men-at-arms rode down to the shore and stared across the water toward Mont St. Michel. They had called to him once or twice, and on one occasion an archer had loosed an arrow at him when he did not reply. A single sweep of his oars had moved the boat away from the danger of the arrow, it is true, and the archer tried no others, for the distance was full fifteen score yards. But here was another sign that Mont St. Michel would probably have to face the English soon, which meant to Edmond that he and his father must somehow find an answer to their problem.

Day after day the boy launched his boat upon the tide, and day after day returned with his fish, though still his problem remained unsolved. And finally he took to his oars for the fourteenth time since he had crossed the sands from Tombelaine, and rowed again toward his favorite fishing ground near the mouth of the little river.

He reached the spot he had chosen and set to work almost automatically, for still his mind was filled with thoughts of the problem that confronted him, and with recollections of the extraordinary adventures into which he had been precipitated. In all his nineteen years he had had nothing to do with the great events that had gone on around him, and now he found himself catapulted into the very center of events, and knew that he and his father were the only ones who realized the dangers that faced the Abbey and the island city.

A fish tugged at his line, and he pulled it in, disengaged it adeptly from the hook, and dropped it into the basket that stood between his feet. He paused for a moment and watched it flounder about, and wondered if he were not doing exactly

that—if he, caught on the hook that circumstance had dropped in his way, had not been suddenly dropped into a situation wherein he was as helpless as was the fish that now lay more quietly in the basket. He frowned and baited his hook again, and as he cast it once more into the water he determined that though he might flounder, it would be to more purpose than the fish had shown. It was no idea of the boy's merely to fight against the difficulties that surrounded him. He determined then and there to see his way through to the end—to oppose with every particle of his strength the treason of du Brée and the villainy of Robert Jolivet. What a fisherboy could do against these powerful noblemen he did not know. He had always been told that between the powerfully placed nobility and the lowly such as himself, existed a vast space that could not be crossed by such as he. Yet he knew that Joan of Arc had been but a peasant girl, and she had led the armies of France. She had been ennobled and had led King Charles to Rheims to be crowned. If a peasant girl could do that, why could not he—a fisherman—manage somehow to put a stop to the treacherous activities of Sir Clément du Brée?

He heard a shout from the shore a couple of hundred yards away, and looked up. A group of men on horseback were there—seven of them. More English men-at-arms, he supposed. What they were doing he did not know, but no sooner had he looked up than they shouted again. They wanted him for something, obviously, but he was in no mood to fraternize with Englishmen. The whole countryside was overrun by them and he had no desire to deal with them. He had had rather more than enough to do with the English during his experience on Tombelaine. Consequently, he shrugged his shoulders, and went on with his fishing.

Still, however, they shouted to him, and when he looked up again he wondered if these men were really English after all.

They probably were, of course, but it might possibly be that they were not. The result of this question in his mind was that he drew in his lines, and rowed closer to the shore, watching warily lest some one of them speed an arrow at him. Having come within easier range of their voices he stopped, and hailed them.

"Who are you?" he shouted.

"Friends," replied their leader. "How can we cross the waters and reach Mont St. Michel?"

"When the tide has ebbed, you can ride across the sands," cried Edmond.

"We dare not wait," objected the leader of the party. "The English may spy us and come upon us in force. Come and take us in your boat."

"Nay," shouted Edmond. "My boat is too small to hold so many, and would be swamped."

"Then go to the mount and send aid," cried the man.

"Who are you?" asked Edmond again.

"Messengers to the Countess and to Lady Claire du Val," came the reply.

"Messengers from whom?"

"From my lord the Count de la Perche."

Edmond waved his hand.

"I shall bear the word," he cried, and bent to his oars.

When Edmond grounded his boat on the little beach, Sir Clément du Brée was at the King's Gate; and, because there was nothing else to do, it was to him that the boy announced the arrival of the party on the shore.

"You say they are messengers to Lady Claire?" demanded du Brée.

"Yes, my lord."

"From the Count de la Perche?"

"Yes, my lord."

"What proof have you that what they say is true?"

"I have no proof, my lord," replied the boy, angered at the knight's surly tone. "I but repeat what was told to me."

"Then get you about your fishing," ordered the knight, "and leave to others such matters as this. When the tide has ebbed they can ride across the sands. Then, if they are what you say they are, they may enter. I shall send no boat to them, lest they be Englishmen bent on slaying the boatmen."

A guard nearby nodded his head sagely.

"It is a new trick, my lord," he commented.

It was plain to the boy that nothing further was to be gained from the knight, even though he felt certain that the group of men on the shore were not enemies. Du Brée had told him to go again about his fishing, and he decided to take the opportunity to leave. Thus he could once again approach the spot where the messengers were waiting, and if they were threatened, he might, somehow, manage to get them in his boat, though they would have to leave their horses behind. It was true that seven men would weight the little craft down dangerously, but the sea was smooth, and with care they might make their way safely away from the shore. Of course, the English might not come, and in that case, he could direct them across the sands when the tide had ebbed sufficiently to make it possible for them to ride through the waters.

Back across the intervening distance he rowed, still pondering his troubles, and not until he had rowed full two thirds of the way did he think to look over his shoulder toward where the mounted men were awaiting him. But what he saw caused him to cry aloud in surprise, for there, not an arrow-flight away from the little group upon the shore, were a score of madly riding English men-at-arms. Their swords were pounding furiously against the flanks of their horses; their shields were held tightly against their breasts; their lances—long and sharp-

pointed—slanted forward, ready to be dropped into the grooves at the upper edges of their shields, there to be supported as the men charged.

Where that body of the enemy had come from the boy did not know, but it was obvious, even at that distance, that the seven messengers were themselves not English. Furthermore, they were about to be overthrown, for seven men could not hope to stand against the score of charging horsemen. What the boy could do he did not know, but having seen the danger, he threw himself back upon his oars once more, and rowed as he had never rowed before. In that single backward glance, he had seen that the little group of messengers were planning to sell their lives dearly, for their swords were drawn, and their shields were on their arms, while their horses' heads were turned toward the advancing English. It might be that, if they could hold off the attackers for even a little time, he could aid them—though how, he did not know.

Stroke after stroke Edmond pulled swiftly, his boat bounding forward toward the little point of land on which the seven men were preparing to defend themselves. There was no chance of escape, for the English already had cut off their retreat. They could make their stand where they were and be killed or taken prisoners, or they could retreat into the water, which, immediately off the little point, lay ten feet deep. If their horses could swim and thus support the armored men, they might yet manage to escape, but not one of them dared risk the water without his mount, for, weighted as they were with armor, they would sink like stones.

Madly Edmond rowed, but before he had covered half the distance that remained, he heard the crash of the attack. Shouts and the screams of horses came plainly to his ears, with ever and anon the crash of a blade on armor. He glanced over his shoulder, and was horrified at what he saw. Only five men

remained of the seven who had been there, while two riderless horses, frightened and wounded, were dashing about in the shallow water beside the point. But as he looked he saw the leader of the messengers rise in his stirrups and swing his sword high —saw him bring it down with a fearful sweep upon the very crown of one of his attackers, saw the man reel in his saddle and fall to the ground. The whirl of the skirmish redoubled, while the boy strained still harder at his oars, and shouted as he rowed.

"For God and St. Michael!" he cried. "Ride into the water! Swim your horses to my boat!"

Half a dozen more strokes and he tumbled his oars into the boat, leaping to his feet as he did so. He tripped over his fishing gear, but got to his feet and kicked his harpoon to one side. Not fifty feet away, there on the bank, the struggle was still furious. Another one of the messengers had been swept from his saddle, and two more Englishmen were down. A horse stumbled and threw an English man-at-arms crashing to the ground, and instantly came the sound of other horses' hoofs as they clashed against the armor of the fallen man.

"Into the water!" shouted Edmond, with all his strength. "Come! I will pick you up!"

His voice sounded clear and strong above the rattle of armor and the clash of weapons—above the screams of horses and the cries of men, and in a moment the leader of the messengers saw him.

"Into the water!" he cried to his men, and waited until they had swung their horses down the shelving bank. After them he dashed, while the English spurred furiously in pursuit. Into the water in a cloud of spray the fighting horsemen plunged. For half a dozen steps their horses made their way through the shallow water, ere they suddenly plunged shoulder-deep and then were forced to swim. One Frenchman was well in the

lead. Edmond seized the fellow by the hand and swung him dripping over the stern, while the horse, relieved of the man's weight, swam fearfully in circles about the little boat. Then another Frenchman was swung in, though his horse almost capsized the boat in a frightened lunge. Only the leader and one other remained; but they, followed too closely by the English, a dozen of whom were swimming their horses determinedly through the deep water, seemed unable to come nearer. For a moment Edmond watched, and then dropped suddenly on to his thwart, and seized his oars once more.

"Drag them in when I have reached them!" he shouted to the two men he had saved, and such was the tone of authority in his voice that neither of the two had any thought but of obeying.

Rapidly the boy backed the little boat toward the nearest Frenchman, but even as the latter's hand was outstretched for help, a huge English man-at-arms swung up his sword and smote the fellow straightway from his saddle. Weighted by his armor, the unfortunate man sank like a plummet, while only a string of bubbles marked his passing.

"Save Master Philippe!" cried one of the men in the boat, and Edmond, horror-stricken by the tragedy that had taken place before his very eyes, swept the boat about in order to bring it closer to the only remaining Frenchman in the water. Three strokes and he was almost near enough—another stroke would do it. But that same fierce Englishman, swimming his huge war-horse closer to the struggling Frenchman, raised his sword to strike. The Frenchman, whose horse was worn, was up to his waist in the water and could not protect himself. In an instant Edmund saw that the boat could not reach the man in time. He dropped his oars, seized his short harpoon, and with one fierce lunge threw it heavily at the threatening enemy. Through the man's shoulder the heavy point passed, between

the breastplate and the pauldron. The sword dropped from the fellow's nerveless grasp. He gasped in amazement and pain, and made one tremendous effort to turn his horse once more toward the shore. But the effort was too much; he tried to seize his horse's harness for support but he could not, and suddenly he fell sideways into the water, to disappear beneath the foaming surface.

In another instant, Edmond was at his oars again. The boat swung about, while the two he had rescued reached out for the man whose life the fisherboy had saved. With a mighty effort they swung him into the boat, and Edmond, without another word, rowed rapidly away from that bloody point of land, where the wounded horses still screamed upon the beach, and toward which the English who had entered the water made their disappointed way.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WITH SWORD AND BUCKLER

SEPARATED though the town was by more than a mile of water from the shore where the skirmish had taken place, it had been with little difficulty that the guards on the walls had made out what had happened. Nor could they resist shouting the news of the event to the citizens in the street. The result was that before Edmond had succeeded in swinging the last of the rescued men into his boat, half the population of Mont St. Michel was excitedly watching from the ramparts, from turrets and bastions, windows and eaves and roofs, and even from the narrow beach outside the King's Gate. Half a dozen fishermen had launched their boats and were rowing hurriedly to his aid, and others who had been fishing here and there between the city and the shore as hurriedly drew in their lines and did the same. The watchers at the city cheered loudly and talked excitedly among themselves, while Sir Louis d'Estouteville, suspecting from the cheers and excitement that something unusual was afoot, made his way rapidly to the King's Gate and learned the news from the guard.

Meanwhile Edmond, with the three rescued men in his boat, was rowing toward the island city, while the fishermen who had gone to his assistance approached one by one and offered their help. The sea, however, was smooth, and there was no need for Edmond to transfer his passengers, with the result that those

who had come to help, turned their boats about and formed an impromptu guard of honor as the boy rowed his dripping passengers toward the King's Gate where the excited citizens of the little city were still cheering and talking loudly among themselves.

To a town such as Mont St. Michel, detached from the world—cut off not only by its position but also because of the fact that the whole country round about was in the hands of the enemy—such a happening as that of which Edmond was the hero was enough to create a tremendous sensation, and long before the heavily laden boat with its accompanying flotilla of fishermen had come within an arrow shot of the King's Gate, Edmond was being cheered again and again. Even Sir Louis was impressed by what had occurred. On questioning the guard further, he learned that the boy who now was bringing in the rescued men, and the boy who had reported the arrival of the English fleet, were one and the same.

"And his name?" asked the captain. "What is it?"

"Edmond, my lord," replied the guard. "Edmond, the son of Arnaud the fisherman—Arnaud who was crippled when the choir of the Abbey church fell years ago."

"How old is the lad?" asked Sir Louis.

"He must be eighteen, my lord. Mayhap nineteen — and a sturdy fellow withal."

The crowd pressed down to the water's edge as Edmond brought his boat about the point of rocks that jutted out beside the narrow strip of sand, and grounded it in the shallow water before the King's Gate. A dozen eager hands seized the bow and dragged the little craft high and dry, and fell back only when Sir Louis d'Estouteville strode down toward the boat.

"Welcome to Mont St. Michel," cried the knight as the newcomers leaped from the boat.

"I give you thanks, my lord," replied the leader of the party.

"In my own name and in the name of my lord the Count de la Perche, in whose service we have come, I give you thanks."

"By what name shall I address you?" asked Sir Louis.

"I am Philippe de Courtenay, esquire to my lord count."

"Then shall you be the guest of Prior Jean Gonault."

"Once more I give you thanks, my lord," replied Philippe. "But ere we go further I must thank this fisherboy, without whose aid my lord would have lost an esquire and two more men-at-arms. And reward him I must. What reward, my lord, is fitting?"

Edmond flushed with happiness. What he had done he had done without thought of reward. Nor would he have thought much of it if, as might have been expected from a person so highly born toward him whose birth was lowly, no word of thanks had been forthcoming. Any word of thanks from Master Philippe would have been, in Edmond's eyes, munificent. But there, before the very eyes of more than half the population of the little city, the representative of the Count de la Perche had thanked him—and had offered a reward. Edmond tried to speak, but the words would not come, and before he could stammer forth anything, Sir Louis spoke.

"Let me reward him, Master Philippe," said the knight, and Edmond's mouth fell open in renewed amazement. He looked at the captain of the guard questioningly, wondering whether the remark might have been made in jest, but Sir Louis's face was serious as he looked at the brawny boy who stood before him.

"You are Edmond, the son of Arnaud, are you not?" asked the knight.

"Ay, my lord," replied Edmond, surprised that the knight should have his name so pat.

"How old are you?"

"Nineteen, my lord."

"You are a fisherman?"

"Ay, my lord."

"You are sturdy," commented the knight thoughtfully. "How would you like to be a man-at-arms?"

"Oh, my lord!" cried Edmond eagerly, "there is nothing I would rather be. But my father—without me to earn for him, he would go hungry."

Sir Louis looked at him grimly.

"You will earn rather more as a man-at-arms than you can earn, methinks, as a fisherman."

"And I, my lord," broke in Master Philippe, "will, with your permission, give him his equipment."

"There," said Sir Louis, "that is a right noble offer. Does it strike your fancy?"

"Oh, ay, my lord," cried Edmond.

"Then from today you are a man-at-arms," replied Sir Louis. "Rid yourself of your boating and your fishing gear, and come to me as soon as you have done so. I shall be at the guard-room within the Abbey barbican."

It was thus that Edmond made the first great step in his life. Born the son of a fisherman, he had fully expected always to remain a fisherman, and to bring up his own sons, if ever he had sons, in the same trade, even though to be a man-at-arms had always been his great ambition. And now all that was changed. In one grand step he had become a man-at-arms, and his equipment was to be given him by one of gentle blood as a mark of gratitude and, he hoped, as a mark of some esteem as well. And the great Sir Louis himself had told him that from that very day he was no longer a fisherman—that he was, instead, to be an armed defender of the city he called home—a soldier employed by the Abbey that crowned the steep hill upon the side of which the little city clustered.

Nor was that all. Where formerly the boy had been merely a fisherman, unnoticed by his fellow citizens save as he was noticed by other fishermen and those to whom he sold his fish, now, at one great leap, he was a hero—a character known by everyone—spoken to by merchants—clapped on the back by men-at-arms—smiled at by burghers' pretty daughters who, before, had never seemed to realize that he existed.

It was with difficulty that he made his way through the crowd, each of whom seemed to wish to congratulate him—to ask him concerning his adventure—to stand and talk with him—to tell him what they had seen, at a distance of more than a mile, of the skirmish from which he had rescued those three men. But delayed though he was, he finally made his way across the drawbridge, through the King's Gate, and along the street past the watchman's tower, to the dingy room where his father eagerly awaited him.

For a time Arnaud had been forced to sit alone in the room wondering what was meant by all the excitement that he could hear outside. That something highly unusual was afoot was obvious to him, but he could not make out what it was, nor did he have the slightest idea that his son was the center of it. But, finally, the first of a score of friendly fishermen had come running in to relate to him all they knew of what had taken place. Thus it was that Arnaud, before Edmond was able to push his way into the room, had a fairly clear idea of all that had occurred.

"My son," cried the crippled man when, at last, he saw Edmond come into the crowded room. "My son. Come to me, that I may give my blessing. Ah, Edmond. You have made a great step forward in the world. And I honor you for thinking of your crippled father when your great reward came to you."

But though Sir Louis d'Estouteville could bring that great change about, and Master Philippe could present the former fisherboy with a shirt of linked steel, with steel cap, dagger, buckler, sword, and pike, it was impossible that Edmond should take his place at once as a capable soldier, accepted by the other men-at-arms as one of them. It is true that not another man-at-arms in the entire garrison was so perfectly equipped as he, but that seemed, at first, to be almost a handicap, for many a man with poorer arms than Edmond's could best him at sword play, or with pike and shield. And many a sharp joke was played upon him by the rough and ready soldiers with whom, as a member of the garrison, he was thrown. Some there were who were immediately jealous of him, and who strove to pick quarrels with him. Others interested themselves in his welfare, or pretended to, because he had received attentions and kindnesses from the great Sir Louis and from Master Philippe. But here and there, among the soldiers, was an honest, straightforward man who, without thought of jealousy or favor, saw in the broad-shouldered young man excellent material from which to make a man-at-arms of the highest type, and Edmond, honest and sincere as he was, recognized the honesty and sincerity of these uncommon men. And of them all, of course, it was Robert le Sagittaire whom Edmond most admired. Thus it was that he hardened himself to the boisterous and sometimes brutal jokes played on him—to the insincere flattery with which some approached him—and during every spare moment practised with his new weapons to make himself proficient in their use.

War, of course, was the major business of that age. Consequently, though Edmond had had small experience in the use of weapons, he knew more than a little how they should be used. Since boyhood he had watched with keenest interest the martial exercises of the soldiers of the place, and often, as a lad,

had made weapons of wood, and with other lads had fought fights that sometimes turned out to be bloody and painful enough, despite the absence of sharp blades and steel points. Thus it was that he took readily to the use of the edged weapons that had come to him.

His military duties were, at first, extremely simple. He was given the plainest of tasks. Not for him was the important watch at the King's Gate. Not for him were the important duties outside the Abbey barbican or upon the North Tower. Instead, he was set to furbishing up the harness of Sir Louis's horses—all save the nobleman's war horse, which was tended with the utmost care by two elderly men-at-arms with long years of experience in the wars. The boy was also assigned, from time to time, to the simple task of lookout on that section of the wall immediately adjacent to the watchman's tower—a place of minor importance, for no watchman on the wall could see so much or so clearly as could the watchman in the tall tower that soared far above it.

Aside from these duties, there was little for the boy to do but spend hour after hour practising with his weapons. Much of this was, of course, required of him, and many a buffet did he receive from the hardened soldiers with whom he practised. Yet every buffet taught him that there must be a way to protect himself from such a blow, and rarely was a painful blow given that did not set him to learn how to protect himself from another like it.

Nor did he cease his practice when the hours assigned for practice ended. Even after he had gone home, he went through all that he had learned, showing his father this thrust and that parry—this feint and that blow. He set up a board in their room, and hacked and thrust at it for hours every evening, while his father urged him on, encouraged him, talked to him.

His years of fishing had given him sturdy muscles, powerful

hands, muscular wrists; his sword seemed more than light enough in his grasp, as he thrust and parried and stood on guard. His buckler, too, strapped to his left arm, seemed to have less weight than he could use.

"I could use a blade full twice as heavy," he told his father one evening. "And surely, such a blade would be better for my uses."

"It may be," nodded his father, "but wiser men than you make the swords that soldiers use. Be not over-anxious to discard them. But if the blade seems light, why not weight it and try it out? Practise with a heavy sword, and use one of usual weight when the time for serious use of blades has come. Thus will your arm develop, and thus with more strength and better swordsmanship—not merely with a heavier blade—will you overcome your adversary. And your buckler—do the same with that."

So, evening after evening, Edmond practised with his blade weighted with heavy sinkers taken from his fishing gear, until he felt that even thus handicapped he could hold his own, and finally he put in his appearance at the narrow tilt-yard assigned to the men-at-arms for martial practice.

"What ho!" shouted a boisterous man-at-arms, who was the turnkey of the Abbey dungeons. "What kind of weapon have you there, my swordsman?"

"Naught but a weighted sword," replied Edmond.

"Weighted?" asked the fellow. "And for what reason?"

"That I may accustom myself to a heavier blade, and thus find the one I use the easier to wield."

"You are a simpleton," cried the man-at-arms. "You cannot protect yourself with that, much less do anyone aught of harm."

"Mayhap I cannot," nodded Edmond. "Yet shall I practise with it."

The boy was assigned the task of lookout.

"Then up with your guard," roared the fellow, "and I shall give you a drubbing."

Edmond lifted his strangely weighted blade and fell on guard, while his opponent, laughing and boastful, took his place opposite. For only two weeks had the boy been a man-at-arms at all, and thus his sword-play was awkward, especially as he was handicapped by the added weight that he had given his blade. Yet, so carefully had he learned to protect himself from this and that and the other form of attack, that his boastful antagonist, though now and again he came close, was unable, in five minutes' time, so much as to touch the young man. It is true that Edmond was intent on guard, and made no effort to attack, until his opponent, growing ugly, because of his own ill-success, burst forth in criticism.

"Do you call that sword-play?" he demanded. "You have done naught but defend yourself since we began. It is no wonder that I have not pummeled you. Even so bad a swordsman as you can defend himself if he makes no effort to do aught else."

"I had thought first to test out my weighted sword," replied Edmond. "And now I know that I can make some sort of defense despite its added weight. So I shall attempt something else. Thus!"

He threw himself forward in a bold attack, thrust low at his adversary's legs, and, as the fellow turned his sword to parry the blow, withdrew his blade and swung it straight at the man's steel cap.

There was a clash of steel on steel. A spark jumped brightly from the sword's edge, and the fellow dropped his sword and tumbled in a heap to the ground.

Robert and a dozen other men-at-arms, who had gathered round to watch the affair, leaped forward, and raised the stunned man to his feet.

"Dash some water in his face," cried one.

"Serves him well enough," laughed another. " 'Twas prettily done, Edmond. It would have been a pretty blow had there been no added weight to your blade. For a two weeks' swordsman you do well enough. There's my hand on it!"

"And mine!" cried another. "I had thought to see you soundly beaten for venturing to tie all this strange fishing gear upon your blade."

"We'll make another Christophe of him yet," laughed Robert.

"That we will," echoed someone.

"Make what of me?" asked Edmond.

"Don't you know of Christophe?" demanded Robert. "The strongest man-at-arms ever seen in France?"

"Why should he know?" asked another. "Christophe disappeared before this lad was born. He hasn't been heard from in twenty years or more."

"What became of him?" asked Edmond.

"No one knows," explained Robert. "He was on duty one day and he was gone the next, and we haven't found another like him since. But if only you continue to improve for two more years as you have in the past two weeks you'll go far toward besting even Christophe."

Others echoed these congratulations, and when the stunned man-at-arms opened his eyes and stared half-dazed about him, it was to be met with a rollicking series of guffaws and suggestions that he go down on the sands in order to learn his swordplay anew among the fisherboys.

Nor were Edmond's experiences confined only to these rough passages with men-at-arms. Sir Clément du Brée, it is true, paid him little enough attention, save to speak sharply to him, and to belittle him each time he came upon him when Edmond was on duty.

"A fisherman for a man-at-arms," he grumbled aloud one

day as if talking to himself, when he had come with Robert le Sagittaire to inspect the guarded ramparts. Edmond, imitating as closely as he could the martial bearing of Robert himself, had done his utmost to appear soldier-like and alert. Certainly his sea-trained eyes had seen as clearly and as far as had any guard on duty on the wall, and no newcomer would have guessed that his experience as a man-at-arms was so brief and so recent. Nevertheless, du Brée had sneered at him before passing on, leaving Edmond bitter with the injustice of the affront. Later Robert had made light of it, it is true, and had himself complimented the boy upon his bearing.

"I have spent more years at soldiering," the man-at-arms had said, "than I sometimes care to remember, and ever have I noticed that the nobleman or knight least experienced in the wars is most free with his criticism. Look you, now. Does Sir Louis make such remarks when he passes you on the wall? Nay. That he does not. And why? Well, first he knows that in the time you've had to learn your duties it is impossible that you could have learned them all. And in the second place, he knows a man who has the makings of a soldier in him. Fall short of what he has a right to expect, and no one is more likely to let you know of it than Sir Louis. A poor man-at-arms is something that makes his very stomach turn. I've heard him give some careless fellow such a lashing with his tongue as has put the fellow on his best behavior for a six-month. And rare are words of praise from Sir Louis. What you do that is right is only what he expects, and to his mind you deserve no praise for that. But he is as certain to say nothing amiss when such remarks are unfair, as Sir Clément is like to make ugly remarks for the very love of making them. Give that man ten years of war, and it may be he'll know a soldier when he sees one—but he does not now, and his remarks but show his own lack of experience!"

And bitter though Edmond felt toward the arrogant young knight, these words from Robert le Sagittaire were music in his ears.

Master Philippe, too, spoke to him sometimes when he passed.

"Well, Edmond," he asked one day, "is this work of a man-at-arms more to your liking than fishing for a living on the tide?"

"Oh, ay, Master Philippe," replied the boy. "That it is, though sometimes it does seem that fishing has made me awkward enough with sword and pike and buckler."

"Not so," replied Philippe. "I saw you at sword-play the other day, and though it cannot be fairly said that you have mastered every turn of it, methinks you show fair promise to be better than most, and that before long."

But of all the words of praise that came to the boy's grateful ears, the ones he held in highest esteem were those of Lady Claire herself. She had come to see Arnaud a few weeks after Edmond had become a man-at-arms, and, as luck would have it, Edmond, too, was at home. He had been lunging and cutting at the plank he had set up, and when the door had opened he had paid no attention, for his back was turned and he imagined that some other fisherman had come to spend half an hour with his father. He was busily practising a difficult thrust, and just as Lady Claire entered, he lunged so hard that the point of his blade passed clean through the board, leaving a full three inches of the point beyond its other side.

"Mon Dieu!" cried Lady Claire. "What a thrust that was! I am glad it was not I who stood in its way."

Edmond turned suddenly, his hand still on the hilt of his sword while the blade remained wedged in the wood. For a moment he flushed, and then, to his own surprise, spoke suddenly.

"Would that I could give such a thrust in your behalf, my lady," he replied. "Then would I feel that being a man-at-arms was infinitely worth the effort."

"No knight could have spoken better, Edmond," she smiled. "And if ever I need a man-at-arms to strike a blow for me, then I would be glad if you were he. But I fear that that is not like to come. I am but now going about the town to see for the last time those whom I have seen so often since first I came to Mont St. Michel."

"For the last time, my lady?" asked Edmond in surprise.

"You are leaving Mont St. Michel, my lady?" asked Arnaud.

"Yes, I am leaving," she answered. "'Twas to take my mother and me hence that Master Philippe came from my lord Count de la Perche."

"But the English," cried Edmond. "There is danger."

Lady Claire smiled.

"Less than you might think," she replied. "Sir Clément du Brée will take a body of men-at-arms and accompany us to St. Malo. 'Tis but thirty miles, and there we will be in Brittany, safe from the English. From St. Malo to Tours and the Castle of Loches the way will be easy enough, and then we shall be under the protection of my lord count and King Charles himself."

Edmond stood blinking at the news. With Lady Claire gone Mont St. Michel would be a very different place. He had not realized how much he had hoped to earn her approbation.

"But, my lady," he began, "'tis true that once you have come to Brittany you will be safe enough, but for some miles you must pass through country overrun with English. Would that I could go among the men-at-arms who are to guard you!"

Lady Claire smiled.

"If it would please you," she replied, "I shall have Master Philippe make the request of Sir Clément. And now I must be

gone, to see others for the last time. We leave tomorrow at midnight, I am told. Farewell, Arnaud. And you, Edmond, I may see upon the way."

She smiled as she swept out, and her maid, who had remained standing just outside the open door, smiled at Edmond as she turned away, but the boy stood staring after the slender little lady as she turned into the street, and did not see the maid.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE GUARD AT THE GATE

EDMOND slowly withdrew his sword from the plank through which he had thrust it, replaced it in its scabbard and sat down upon a stool before the fireplace. He frowned, wondering why he felt so ill at ease. The news that Lady Claire had given him was, of course, at the bottom of it and her announcement that she and Master Philippe were to leave Mont St. Michel had more than a little to do with this sudden feeling of depression. With those two gone Edmond's most powerful friends would have disappeared. But he knew that no such selfishness as that was responsible for his uneasiness. For several minutes he sat staring into the cold fireplace, quite unconscious that his father was closely watching him. It was only when the older man leaned forward and whispered that Edmond realized that his was not the only mind pondering the problem.

"Is my lord du Brée to be trusted," asked Arnaud, "to lead Lady Claire safe to St. Malo?"

Instantly Edmond's mind grasped the significance of that pointed question, and instantly he saw clearly what it was that troubled him.

"No," he cried. "There can be no doubt of it."

"Sh!" his father warned. "Be careful with your speech."

"But, Father," whispered Edmond in reply, "if Lady Claire be taken to St. Malo and thence to Tours and the Castle of Loches, my lord du Brée can never again see her, and so Robert Jolivet cannot give her to him in marriage."

"Quite so," nodded Arnaud. "Quite so."

"But what," asked Edmond, "do you suppose it is that he is planning?"

"I know not," admitted Arnaud. "Yet there is little doubt in my mind that something is not as it should be. My lord du Brée goes with Lady Claire. He takes a body of men-at-arms from Mont St. Michel. Master Philippe goes as well, but has only two men with him, for the others all were slain. The party, then, is made up of Lady Claire, together with her lady mother, two maids—or is it three?—and Master Philippe with his two men. In addition to these are my lord du Brée, and his men-at-arms—we know not how many, perhaps a dozen or a score—not many more, I warrant, for there are no more than are required within these walls. Perhaps the whole party will number twenty souls—perhaps thirty, but it is not likely that there will be more. Of these, four or five are women—helpless, if the party is attacked—almost worse than helpless, for the men-at-arms must guard them most carefully.

"Now the English rarely travel in bands of fewer than a score, and often their numbers are much larger. More than that—" his whisper fell much lower and he glanced at the door to make sure that no one was within earshot—"we know that my lord du Brée has designs upon my lady Claire. He cannot keep her here when the Count de la Perche has sent for her, yet Robert Jolivet has promised him her fortune and her hand. Is my lord du Brée like to aid her to travel safe from here to Brittany and thence to the protection of the king? Is he like to let a fortune slip thus betwixt his fingers and aid it in the slipping? We do not know, of course, but to a nobleman willing to play traitor to his trust in order to better his position, to play traitor to my lady Claire would not be difficult. And if I remember your story correctly, Robert Jolivet told him that he knew of no other fortune that was to be had so readily."

Edmond blinked thoughtfully for a moment.

"But what can he do?" he asked suddenly. "How can he play traitor to Lady Claire with her mother and Master Philippe there, besides a score of men-at-arms whose very necks would pay were they to be caught in such a game?"

Arnaud shook his head and stared thoughtfully at nothing.

"I know not," he admitted. "But I do not trust him."

With that the two were forced to be content, though through all the rest of the afternoon and evening they both could think of nothing else.

Edmond was on duty from midnight until dawn, pacing the ramparts at the foot of the watchman's tower, and for an hour after he had gone on duty he could hear the sound of the waves as the tide ebbed across the sands. The night was dark, but he could tell that the water was slipping rapidly away, leaving the moist and level sands silent and wide about the island city. Another hour passed. He heard voices in the street just inside the wall on the top of which he paced, but he thought nothing of it until, to his surprise, he heard the creak of the gate as it opened, heard the sound of the portcullis as it was raised, heard the ponderous roar of the drawbridge as it fell.

He leaned over the inner parapet to listen, peering toward the King's Gate, but he could see nothing except the ring of light that came from a torch that was hidden from his sight. And then he heard the clicking of the ratchets as the drawbridge was lifted—heard the metallic rumble of the portcullis as it fell—heard the creak of the heavy gate as it was closed.

Someone had gone forth upon the sands. Who it was Edmond did not know. He had heard nothing of any plan to send a man forth, but that was not strange. It might be that no one had known of it save Sir Louis and Prior Jean, until the guards were ordered to open the gate. Edmond went to the outside edge of the section of the wall he guarded, and peered

into the darkness across the sands. Not a thing could he see. He listened, but not a sound could he hear. So he paced back and forth along the wall in the night, wondering who had gone forth, and why.

Two hours or a little more had passed before he heard another sound that interested him. There was a shout from outside the King's Gate, and though the watchman's tower and a heavy turret stood between him and the newcomer, effectively preventing him from hearing the words, Edmond felt certain that the voice was that of Sir Clément du Brée.

There was a little delay before the gate was opened, but finally Sir Clément entered, spoke arrogantly for a minute or so to Robert le Sagittaire, who was on duty, and then strode along the narrow street, bound, apparently, toward his rooms up near the Great Outer Stairway of the Abbey.

Edmond tried to imagine why the knight had once more been upon the sands. A month and a little more had passed since that exciting visit to Tombelaine. Could Sir Clément have made another visit to Robert Jolivet? And if so, what reason had he given this time for going?

Edmond tramped thoughtfully back and forth along his section of the wall, gazing out into the darkness. He wished that he could go forth with a lantern in order to follow the footprints that Sir Clément had left upon the sands. Since the tide had ebbed, no other had gone forth from the gate, and it would be simple to follow the trail. But there was no way to leave the city, even if his duty had not kept him there upon the wall.

For another hour the boy paced back and forth, still wondering, and at last the eastern sky began to gray. Where formerly only blackness had met his eyes as he gazed out across the sands, now vague shapes appeared, shifting, fading, growing plainer as the sky grew light. The coast of Normandy showed dimly against the dawn, and finally a cloud that hung

low upon the horizon turned slowly pink and red—seemed for a time as if to glow with fire, and then rapidly faded before the rays of the rising sun.

A clatter of armed men came from the stair beyond the watchman's tower, and presently the relief appeared. After six long hours on guard, Edmond was relieved and permitted to leave the wall.

He hurried down the stairs and found Robert le Sagittaire. The gate was being opened by the newly placed guards, and Robert yawned mightily as he turned to betake himself off to his quarters for a few hours of sleep.

"Ho, Edmond," remarked the man-at-arms. "Now for a little sleep. No?"

Edmond smiled. Sleep could come later. He wanted information now.

"There seems to be more than a little going on, these dark nights, upon the sands," he remarked.

Robert nodded.

"Spying upon the English," he grunted.

"Who is the spy?" asked Edmond.

"My lord du Brée," replied Robert. "He is to take a dozen men-at-arms to guard Lady Claire and her lady mother from here to St. Malo, and wished to see if the way were clear. So off he goes alone across the sands and walks as far as Pontorson. Not an Englishman was to be found, so he says. But who would expect to find Englishmen 'twixt here and Pontorson at midnight? Not I, certainly. But I am sleepy. Au revoir!"

Edmond stood alone for a moment in the narrow street. His father would expect him for breakfast, he knew, but he wanted to follow Sir Clément's footprints before others from the city went forth upon the sands. Within an hour or less he could learn more than a little of where the knight had gone.

A group of fishermen greeted him as they passed, bound out through the gate to prepare their boats for the morning tide, and Edmond, returning their greeting, followed them across the drawbridge. No one but himself seemed to notice the trail of footprints that led toward the shore, though he found them soon enough. He left the fishermen and wandered out upon the sands, careful not to follow the footprints exactly lest someone might divine his intentions. But from a distance of a score of feet he paralleled that plain trail in the sand. For three hundred yards it led straight as an arrow toward the shore, and the boy began to think that perhaps, after all, Sir Clément had done as he had explained. But then, quite suddenly, the trail changed sharply to the left, led for another hundred yards toward the east, and then turned sharply once again. Edmond's heart pounded heavily in his excitement as he followed the trail for a hundred steps. There could be no doubt of it now —Sir Clément had once more gone to Tombelaine! Of that there was no doubt, for there across the sands lay the revealing trail, pointing straight and undeviating toward the rocky island that lay beyond.

"Pontorson!" grunted Edmond. "The man has lied again. 'Twas to Tombelaine, not Pontorson, he went."

The boy turned toward the King's Gate, directly across the sands, and ere he had covered half the distance, he came upon du Brée's returning trail. For a moment Edmond stopped and followed it with his eye.

To Tombelaine and from Tombelaine those two trails led. What treachery did all this signify?

Edmond made his way thoughtfully to the King's Gate and through it to the room where his father impatiently awaited him. Nor did he so much as think of breakfast until he had whispered all this newfound information to Arnaud.

"He plans treachery," insisted the boy when he had told his

story. "There can be no doubt of it. But what can it be he plans?"

"Are you to go?" asked Arnaud suddenly.

"I have not been told of it," replied the boy.

"Then you must learn, if you can, what is expected of you," went on his father. "If you are to be taken as a man-at-arms we must plan for that. Perhaps we then can think of some way for you to guard against whatever it is du Brée has planned. Go. Learn, if you can, who makes up the party, and all you can that bears upon the journey."

But though Edmond spent all morning trying to learn who was to go, and by which route, he failed to gather a single jot of information. Robert le Sagittaire was asleep, and Edmond dared ask only the most casual of questions of the others to whom he talked. Nor did he see Master Philippe until noon, when he met the squire in the narrow street. But then, fortunately, Master Philippe spoke to him.

"Well, Edmond," began the squire, "I am sorry you are not to go with us tonight."

"Not to go?" asked Edmond in surprise. "But my lady Claire said that she would ask you to make the request of my lord du Brée."

"And so I did," replied Philippe, "but he replied that already he had chosen his dozen men to go, and furthermore he felt it better to take men more experienced as horsemen than are you. I take it you have had little experience with horses."

"Very little, Master Philippe," replied the boy. "Fishermen have small use for them!"

Philippe laughed.

"True enough," he agreed. "Horses of the land are of no more value to fishermen, I warrant, than your seahorses would be to men-at-arms."

"Then I am not to go," muttered Edmond. "I am sorry,

for I hoped to be of some small service to my lady Claire and you ere you leave us and go to dwell under the protection of the King."

"Take it not amiss, Edmond," replied Philippe. "I owe my life to you—and in saving my life you have already done my lady a small service, and me a great one!"

All afternoon Edmond was on duty on the wall again, and strode up and down, smothering a yawn from time to time, for he had had no sleep. At six o'clock, having been relieved, he made his way down the stairs to the street, intending to get some rest before going on watch at midnight again.

He did not look forward with any pleasure toward pacing up and down upon the wall while Lady Claire and the party with which she was to ride, crossed the drawbridge and disappeared into the night, yet what else he could do he did not know.

He reached the street and turned to cross it toward the low door that led to the room in which his father patiently awaited him, but before he had gone three steps he heard Robert le Sagittaire calling to him.

"Edmond!" bawled the man-at-arms. "Oh, Edmond!"

He turned about in answer to the hail, and Robert called again.

"Off duty, on duty," the fellow shouted. "They've taken a man from me and I must e'en have your aid until midnight. Grumble if you will—all good soldiers do. But come you must to help me stand watch at the King's Gate."

Edmond shrugged his shoulders. He wished now that he had slept at least an hour or two when he had had the time. Since the preceding midnight he had had no sleep, and now he must stand watch for six hours more.

Still, it was with Robert le Sagittaire at the King's Gate—the first time he had been chosen to stand watch with Robert, and the first time, too, that he had been chosen to guard the

gate. That, at least, was encouraging. Few fledgling men-at-arms were called to duties so important as was that.

So for six hours he paced back and forth within the dark and heavy arch, guarding the closed gate and the pulleys and chains that operated the all-important drawbridge and portcullis.

The tide swept in, and he could hear the wash of the waves from time to time as they foamed mildly on the narrow beach outside, and when his long watch came to an end at last, he knew that the tide had turned, and that another hour would see the sands between the King's Gate and the coast of Normandy clear of the sea, save where lay the shallow pools and where the narrow rivulets still slowly followed in the wake of the departed tide.

He had been desperately sleepy midway through his watch, but having driven sleep away, and set his mind upon du Brée and all his questionable plans, the boy was wide awake once more when he and Robert were relieved by the new guard at midnight.

Robert, who had been ordered by Sir Louis to remain at the gate until the departing party had left, told the boy to go home and sleep until noon.

"Not until then will you go on guard again," said the man-at-arms. "You have been on duty more than long enough, and like a youth you failed to sleep when you could. When you have been as long in the wars as I, you'll know enough to sleep whenever there is time for sleep, for more often than enough there is no time."

And Robert disappeared within the base of the turret beside the gate. Lying down upon a pile of straw upon the floor, he bawled to the guard to awaken him as soon as Sir Clément and his party should come; whereupon, tired and clear of conscience, he fell instantly to sleep, as Edmond knew, for the sound of his

snores came rumbling from the dark and narrow room within.

But Edmond now was wide awake. With twelve free hours before him he felt that he could afford to take one of them and wait until Lady Claire and Master Philippe had ridden forth. It was little enough to do, he felt, for somehow those two young people, both so far above him in the world, had meant more to him than any other soul save only his father. Had it not been for Lady Claire, Master Philippe would not have come to Mont St. Michel; and had he not come, Edmond would still have been a fisherman instead of an armor-clad man-at-arms.

For an hour he sat in the darkness of the heavy arch. A torch gleamed from a bracket beside the stairs leading down from the wall, but none of its ruddy radiance penetrated to the shadowed corner where the boy waited. The guards seemed to have forgotten that he was there, and he could only vaguely hear the rumble of their words as they conversed now and then below the torch. From above him, now and then, came a slow tap-tap-tap as the guard, pacing up and down in the passage-way above the gate, used the shaft of his pike as a staff.

How still it was! The tide had ebbed by now, and no sound of water came to his ears. The city seemed to be utterly asleep, and the tap-tap from above and the low voices of the guard only served to accentuate the silence.

It seemed an endless time before the clatter of horses' hoofs came to his ears from the street within. He still sat silently, forgotten now by the guard, and the sound of clattering hoofs grew louder. The whole party was approaching the gate, but still Edmond remained silent in the darkness of the arch. He did not hope to say goodbye to Lady Claire and Master Philippe. He only hoped that he would be able to see them as they passed, and so remained motionless on his bench there in the dark.

Then he heard Sir Louis's voice, and Robert's reply. No one

had had to call that veteran—the first clatter of the horses had roused him.

"Open the gate," ordered Sir Louis, and Robert gave the necessary orders to the guard. Two of them swung the protesting gate upon its hinges. They turned to the chains that raised the iron portcullis, and lowered the great drawbridge, while Edmond still sat unnoticed in the dark. The gateway was suddenly filled with horses. In the darkness Edmond could only vaguely make out the shapes of the riders and their mounts, with here and there a packhorse loaded with bulging, shapeless bundles.

The guards withdrew from the narrow place, and the cavalcade passed through, while Edmond stared in the darkness for a sight of Lady Claire and Master Philippe. Once he felt certain that he had seen Lady Claire, but in the darkness he could not be sure.

Half the cavalcade had rumbled over the reverberating drawbridge into the soft darkness outside when suddenly Edmond leaped to his feet. A packhorse near him shied suddenly in the dark, and pushed against the leg of a mounted man-at-arms beyond. The fellow swore and kicked viciously, while another smote the offending beast across the rump.

For a moment Edmond stood with his hands gripped tensely. He was free until noon—eleven hours! No one would ask for him in all that time. No duties devolved upon him. In eleven hours he knew that he could follow this cavalcade full half-way to St. Malo, and still have time to return. They could not ride fast through the night, with women and packhorses to hold them back. Four miles an hour, perhaps five. He, too, could keep that pace on foot. Nor need he go much more than ten miles, for then the party would be safe in Brittany. He might even go and return by the time dawn came and the King's Gate was opened once more.

The cavalcade was still crowding through the dark archway. A packhorse followed after a man-at-arms, and Edmond, certain that the guards were all within the gate, took hold of a rope that tied the pack in place, and stooping beside the horse, made his way on tiptoe through the arch and across the drawbridge. He felt the sand beneath his feet, and let go the rope he held. He could not follow there lest he be seen. To go at all he must follow well behind. No! What good would one lone man-at-arms be to Lady Claire and Master Philippe following there behind a score of mounted men? He must go before. Unseen, silent, unsuspected in the night, he would lead the way along the English-infested Norman road, until the party had reached the safer land of Brittany.

CHAPTER NINE

AMBUSH

EDMOND stopped in the darkness and looked about him. Behind stood the massive bulk of Mont St. Michel, a ponderous and mysterious shadow—formless but powerful—and there within the arch, not twenty paces distant, the ruddy light from the single flaring torch outlined the gateway where it penetrated the blackness of the mighty wall. He heard the clicking of the chain, and saw the heavy drawbridge rise, slowly cutting that only source of light.

He stood watching until the last faint ray had gone, and a moment later heard the low thunder of the drawbridge as it reached the wall and fell ponderously into place against it. And now he looked about, his eye following the sounds of shuffling horses' feet, of faintly clanking armor, of creaking harness. He was surprised to see that, though no light seemed to come from the lightly clouded sky, nevertheless he could vaguely make out the shadowy and sinuous form of the cavalcade which, by now, was a hundred yards away. He looked carefully, but could not make out any single form in all that shadowy train of men and horses. But he realized that, in order to be safe, he had best keep at least that distance between the cavalcade and himself. Perhaps, he thought, it would be better if he kept full twice that distance, for the leaders would most certainly watch keenly as they rode, and he had no mind to be set upon in the dark—to be slain, perhaps.

He started to walk, keeping far out to the side of the route the party was taking, and almost laughed to himself to see that

by walking rapidly he readily caught up the distance he had lost as he had stopped to look about. On he strode, one hand holding tightly to the scabbard of his sword, lest it rattle against his leg, the other carrying his long and heavy pike as if it were a staff. The creak of harness leather and the shuffle of hoofs in the sand came to his ears, and now and then, through the stillness of the night, he heard the sound of some man's voice as he urged his steed forward or pulled on the halter of a packhorse.

Edmond quickened his pace. It would be better if he were to reach the land ahead of the party, for only across the sands would he be able easily to parallel their course at such a distance. Once on the narrow Norman roads he would be forced to hold to them, or else go scrambling over fields and hedgerows, walls and garden patches.

For twenty minutes he walked steadily, and found himself at last upon the shore. A bush first showed him that he had left the sands, and in another moment he had found the roadway and strode out upon it.

The route the party would take would, he knew, pass through the little village of Beauvoir and thence would lead past the hamlet of Moidrey. From there the road led to Pontorson, where lay the first bridge across the little river Couesnon. Already, he knew, Beauvoir lay but a little way ahead, and with his ears alert for the sound of the horses' hoofs in the darkness behind, he trudged forward, his eyes straining in the darkness for the cluster of huts that lay ahead.

It was unlikely that any English would be at Beauvoir. That cluster of peasants' huts was unimportant, and too uncomfortable to bring them there to spend the night. Still, he knew that danger might lie anywhere, and the task he had assumed was meaningless and useless unless, by marching thus before the party he was trying to protect, he should be able to learn of the whereabouts of enemies in time at least to shout a warning.

The first outlying hut of Beauvoir appeared vaguely in the darkness, and a little way beyond it the cluster of the little town showed black and silent in the night. Not a light was lit, and the inhabitants were certainly all within doors. But now a dog ran, barking savagely, and Edmond shrank from the beast. He tried to calm it, but gentleness was wasted on the half-wild creature, which followed beside him at a distance of a dozen feet barking as if to burst its brazen throat. To draw his sword and slay the animal would be dangerous, for even the swiftest stroke could hardly prevent at least one dying yelp, and such a yelp would tell more plainly than words that the blow had been given. A barking dog might be misinterpreted by Sir Clément and those who rode with him, but a yelping dog would tell them plainly that someone was ahead of them on the road.

So on through Beauvoir Edmond strode, still trying to coax the dog into silence, but not until he had passed the dim shadow of the last house did the dog stop its barking and leave him—and then it was to scurry back through the night to bark and snarl at the horsemen who led the mounted party.

Edmond listened as the barks came to his ears, and presently heard a yelp of pain, followed by a series of yelps that faded away as the dog dashed fearfully from the blade that had seared his flank.

The night seemed pleasantly silent again as the dog took cover to lick his wound, and Edmond, glad that a blow of his had told no such plain story, strode on through the night toward Moidrey a mile or so ahead.

Clumps of trees and bushes showed dimly beside the road, with here and there a gnarled and crooked branch that seemed, in the darkness, to take the shape of some threatening enemy lurking in the shadows. Now and then the boy stepped unexpectedly into a hole in the villainous road, jerking himself suddenly and almost losing his balance, but save for the low

tramp of horses' hoofs far behind him in the dark, not a sound came to his ears.

He passed by Moidrey, which stood well away from the road he was traversing and not a light—not a sound—showed that the simple folk who dwelt there had not deserted it and fled. But Edmond did not think of that. He was heartily glad that no dog came out to bark and snarl and snap at him, for now he would pass no more dwellings for another mile or more, and could walk boldly enough until he should reach the village of Pontorson.

He remembered that Sir Clément had said that he had gone as far as Pontorson the night before, and that he had seen no sign whatever of the English. Of course, the story was not true, as the knight's telltale trail upon the sands had proved. And more than that, Pontorson was a place of some importance for there lay the bridge across the river Couesnon. It might be that the English would maintain a party of men-at-arms at such a place in order to guard the bridge, especially as a very worthy inn had long attracted travelers, and could comfortably be used by the soldiers as their barracks. It behooved Edmond to watch most carefully as he passed through the town.

He stepped forward more rapidly, wishing to gain a greater lead in order to have that much extra time to examine the town carefully, and within ten minutes had gained so much that he could no longer hear the sounds of the horses' hoofs. The road was better, too, and he even tried to run a little. But he stumbled and almost fell in the dark, so he continued at a rapid walk, tapping the road before him with the handle of his pike, like a blind man with his cane.

He looked carefully, now, for the outlying houses of Pontorson, and saw a cluster of them at last. But they were dark and silent, as had been those in the other two hamlets. Nevertheless, Edmond walked stealthily, holding his scabbard lest it

rattle against his leg, and no longer tapping on the roadway with his pike.

The houses were built more closely together now, and as he traversed the narrow street he seemed plunged into such darkness as he could almost feel. Nowhere was there a light that he could see, nowhere a sound. And then, from immediately over his head, came a rasping screech. His blood almost froze, and instantly he gripped his pike in both his hands and shrinking down, turned his face upward in the direction from which the sound had come. For an instant he stood thus, tensely. A breath of breeze fanned his face, and again the screech came to his ears. Then, peering up toward the sky, he saw the swaying sign of the inn—the sign which, as the breeze moved it on its iron rod, screeched, as the metal grated, and falling silent, waited to screech again.

The blood returned to Edmond's heart once more. For a moment he had expected an assault from some furious enemy. And now he saw that only the sign hung there, and furthermore, that the inn was as dark and silent as were the other houses of the town of Pontorson. Which meant, for a certainty, that no Englishmen were about, or if they were that they were asleep as were the citizens of the town. But most likely, he admitted to himself as he strode on, no Englishmen were there.

He could hear the horses' hoofs once more now. They had caught up a little as he had prepared to protect himself from the creaking of the sign. He laughed a little—silently—and strode on toward the bridge, his ears and eyes straining to catch any sound or sight that might suggest that danger lay nearby.

He reached the bridge without detecting anything, and strode across it, hearing the faint murmur of the little waves that lapped against the grassy banks. It seemed less dark now that he was out of the narrow streets once more, and he could

see the shape of the huge and gnarled old tree that grew beside the water near the end of the narrow bridge.

Edmond breathed a breath of deep relief as he stepped upon the farther bank of the little river. He felt himself, now, to be in Brittany, although, of course, the raiding English, he knew, often rode for miles to the west of the little river Couesnon. They might still be found almost anywhere, he knew, yet it was not likely that they would keep any body of men on this side of the bridge of Pontorson. Still, though the chances were that the most dangerous part of the journey was over, still would he continue for a way. He could gain nothing by returning now to Mont St. Michel, for he would only have to wait until the gate opened at dawn.

But now he came to where the road branched. One branch, he knew, led by way of St. Georges and St. Marcan, while the other took the more direct way through Mont Rouault on the way to Dol. He did not hesitate. The shorter way would certainly be the one that the party would choose, so on toward Mont Rouault he strode. But having made his way for two or three hundred yards along the road, he stopped in order to listen for the sound of the horses' hoofs. Some time before, he had heard them as they crossed the bridge, but since then no sound had come to his ears.

He turned his head and listened. At first not a sound could he make out, and then, well off to his left as he faced back, he heard faintly but distinctly, the sound he wished to hear. He listened again, and again it came to his ears. There could be no doubt of it. Sir Clément was leading them along the other road.

Edmond frowned as he stood hesitating for a moment. Had he not so distrusted Sir Clément it might have been that he would not have been led to set himself the task of thus attempting to protect Lady Claire and Master Philippe. And now his dis-

trust increased. There might be some good reason for Sir Clément's taking the longer road, of course. But it was difficult to imagine what the reason might be. It seemed to the boy that it might prove important that he somehow reach that road and regain his position in advance of the party. But he could not return to where the road branched off, for then he would come up behind the party and thus find it difficult, if not impossible, to pass them. He could only make his way across the fields that lay between the road on which he stood and the one he wished to gain.

Without another moment's hesitation he swung himself over the low stone wall that lined the road, and set off running over the fields. But within a dozen steps he stumbled and fell, his pike flying from his hand as he tried to catch himself. And then he wasted a full minute finding the pike. To run across the field's uneven surface in the dark was impossible. He must walk, and he had little time to lose, for unless he hurried he would find that the party had already passed him when he reached that other road.

He walked as rapidly as he could, listening all the while to hear the horses' hoofs. Now and then the sound came to him through the night, and on he hurried. But as he approached the road, he could tell all too plainly that he had taken too much time. The cavalcade was ahead of him even now. He must pass them, and must stay in the field, walking parallel to the road until he had done so.

It was difficult walking, and only by his very greatest effort could he walk more rapidly than the party was advancing. He came to a stone wall and scrambled over it. He tore his way through a patch of briers, heedless of their scratches. Another wall obstructed his way, and then he found himself in a plowed field, where his feet sank deeply into the moist earth.

For more than half a mile he stumbled on, crossing walls, stumbling, stooping to pass beneath the gnarled branches of shadowy trees. But finally he felt that he was sufficiently in the lead to make it possible for him safely to gain the road. He listened and only faintly could he hear the sounds of the party. Encouraged he angled toward the road and came upon it where it was lined with a heavy untrimmed hedge. He tried to make his way through it, but so thick was the growth that it was impossible. He tried in several places to find a passage through, and as he pushed aside the branches he heard the sound of a horse's hoof as it stamped, not twenty yards away on the other side of the hedge. He stopped his movements instantly and listened. From far down the dark road he could hear the muffled sounds of the advancing party, and then he heard a man's voice nearby. He listened, and made out the sound of it clearly, but he could understand only that the man had spoken English.

Edmond's heart mounted into his very throat. For another moment he listened, and as if in response to the voice that had spoken there was a rustle as of a party of men and horses moving. He heard the sound of creaking harness, as if men were climbing into their saddles. Muffled sounds as of horses moving over the grassy strip that paralleled the road next came to his ears, and then all was silence again, save for the sounds that came from Sir Clément's party, and they were clearer—closer now.

Edmond hesitated. How far back along the road that hedgerow ran he did not know. Yet he must run back, if only to warn Master Philippe so that he could guard Lady Claire. It never occurred to Edmond to doubt that Sir Clément, on his latest visit to Tombelaine, had planned the trap that had been so cleverly set there on that hedged-in road.

He knew better than to run. Should he do so and fall, the

sound would certainly carry to the ears of the English. It was marvel enough that they had not heard him as he poked among the hedge. But run though he could not, he walked more rapidly than he had ever walked before. And as he walked the sound of the party came ever more plainly to his ears.

The hedgerow still stood between him and the road, and he had no time now to search for a way through it. And now he knew that the head of the cavalcade was almost opposite in the road. He pushed his way into the hedge until the thick growth forced him to stop. He could tell that the party was almost ready to pass him, and not until then did he call out. Even then he spoke as low as he dared, hoping above hope that his voice would not carry to where the English lay in ambush a hundred yards away.

"Master Philippe!" he called.

Instantly there was a pulling of bridle reins in the road.

"Master Philippe!"

"Who calls me?" asked Philippe suddenly, while the horses that had been pulled up milled about in the darkness.

"It is Edmond who calls, Master Philippe," replied the boy. "Edmond, the son of Arnaud, to whom you gave the shirt of mail and the weapons!"

"What is all this nonsense?" demanded Sir Clément's voice loudly.

"It is no nonsense, Master Philippe," cried Edmond. "A party of English are lying in ambush to attack you. Within five score paces they are waiting even now. Turn about, for the love of St. Michael, and flee! Take my Lady Claire to safety. At once, Master Philippe, at once!"

There was a moment's hesitation there in the road, and the horses seemed nervous and ill at ease as they shook their heads and trampled about despite the tightly drawn reins.

"Do you hear, Sir Clément?" demanded Philippe. "He says that an ambush lies ahead."

"What arrant nonsense!" roared du Brée. "We are in Brittany, man. There can be no ambush. It is the madness of a fisherman who thinks he is a man-at-arms. *En avant!* Forward! We have left danger behind."

Philippe tried to reply, but du Brée rode forward without listening, and though Philippe still held his horse in check for a moment, the men-at-arms behind him began to move forward once more. Full two thirds of the men had passed before Lady Claire reached him, and the whole party, save Philippe and Lady Claire, were once more in motion.

"What shall we do?" asked the girl in a frightened whisper as she tremblingly reined in her mount.

Philippe shrugged his shoulders in the dark.

"What *can* we do?" he asked. "Du Brée and his men seem determined to go ahead. We must follow."

By now they were among the packhorses that had been led behind the party, and ahead of them Lady Claire's mother and her two maids had reined in their horses, fearful of becoming parted from the girl and equally fearful of leaving the protection of the men-at-arms.

"Claire," cried her mother, and there was terror in the older woman's voice. "Claire! Come! Where are you! I cannot see in the dark! Oh, that we had never come! Claire!"

"I am coming, Mother," she replied, but as she spurred her horse forward she instantly reined him in again, for from beyond the head of the column of horsemen—fifty yards away in the velvet darkness of that hedged-in road—she suddenly heard the roar of innumerable galloping hoofs. Armor clashed. Shouts and oaths and the sounds of pounding hoofs filled the narrow road and seemed almost to roar in the darkness.

There was a resounding shock as the galloping band of Eng-

glish crashed headlong into the surprised and unready body of French men-at-arms. A horse screamed as it fell, and its rider, with one terrible cry of pain, went down beneath the thundering hoofs of the charging enemy.

Instantly everything was in confusion. In the impenetrable blackness friend could not be told from foe—the swords that were drawn were wielded without knowledge of where they fell. Wounded horses screamed and dashed here and there. Man after man was thrown from his saddle into the maelstrom of steel-shod hoofs that pounded in every direction in the dark.

Lady Claire screamed, and her screams were echoed by her mother and their maids. The packhorses tore loose and turned about to dash madly back along the road.

"Save my mother!" cried Lady Claire, and Philippe dashed forward in the dark to attempt the task.

Edmond had heard the sound of the English charge even before the sound had reached Lady Claire's ears, for he had been momentarily expecting it. Suddenly he knew that he must hew his way through the hedge, and in a moment had drawn his sword. He crashed it madly into the thickly growing branches, and a cloud of them fell about his ears. He swung again and again, each time mowing his way farther into the foliage. Blow after blow, and finally he found that he was through. He sheathed his sword, and with his pike held in both hands, he dashed forward. The fighting was near at hand, but he could not see in the night-enshrouded road. For a moment he hesitated, and then shouted.

"Lady Claire," he cried. "Where are you?"

"Who calls me?" she called in return, and without waiting to reply, he dashed toward her in the darkness.

A horseman passed him from the direction of the enemy, and the animal's shoulder struck the boy powerfully, sending him sprawling.

He leaped to his feet, but even as he did so he heard Lady Claire cry aloud in terror.

"Who are you?" she screamed. "Let go my rein!"

Edmond leaped forward, but saw nothing until he was within three feet of a huge horse carrying a man. He heard Lady Claire cry out again, and knew that her voice came from just beyond the fellow. Who the man was Edmond did not know, but whoever he was it was evident that he was leading the girl in the direction of the enemy. Edmond seized his pike with both hands and lunged at the figure on the horse.

There was a heavy shock. The man reeled in his saddle and saved himself from falling only by clutching at his horse's harness. His horse, too, frightened by the attack, leaped forward, and in an instant disappeared in the darkness.

Still the little battle raged twenty yards away, but Edmond paid it no attention. He seized Lady Claire's rein.

"Lady Claire," he cried, more softly this time, "'tis Edmond. Come. Leap from your mount and I will save you."

"But my mother—" protested the girl.

There was a swirl of movement ahead of them and Philippe pulled up his mount.

"I have her here," he shouted, "and the maids are following."

"Then get you from your horses," directed Edmond. "Quickly. All of you. And come with me."

No one seemed to think of asking the meaning of his strange order. Edmond lifted Lady Claire from her saddle, and Philippe, swinging from his own mount, pulled the older woman hastily from hers. The weeping maids seemed almost to tumble from their horses, and in a moment they were beside the road.

"Come," ordered Edmond in an urgent whisper, and with his pike in one hand and Lady Claire's wrist held tightly in the other, he pulled the unresisting girl through the hedge where

he had cut his way. Heedless of torn skirts, of turned ankles, and of scratches, the others followed.

On the road, a half-dozen roaring English men-at-arms broke through the French resistance and dashed madly along the road as if in search of the fleeing group. Luckily the horses they had left took fright, and dashed back along the road that they had come, with the English in pursuit.

The little group stopped for a moment beyond the hedge to listen, but Edmond urged them on.

"Come," he ordered; and with Philippe aiding the Countess du Val, with the boy still firmly holding Lady Claire's small wrist, and with the whimpering maids stumbling on behind, they set off in the darkness across the fields, with six dark and dangerous miles between them and the protection of Mont St. Michel!

CHAPTER TEN

QUICKSANDS

EDMOND realized clearly that to return by way of the bridge at Pontorson was to face almost certain capture, but until he had led the way for half a mile or more, and had finally found the shelter of a half-ruined shed that stood deserted in the fields, he said nothing. Philippe had taken upon himself the duties of a rear guard, while Edmond still led the way with Lady Claire, followed by the Countess du Val and the two maids, who assisted her. Thus it was that Edmond and the four women had entered the shed before Philippe realized what they were doing.

"Edmond," he whispered as he found the door and followed.

"Yes, Master Philippe."

"Why do you stop here?" asked the squire.

"Only in order to decide what we are to do. We dare not return by way of the bridge at Pontorson. It is likely that any portion of the road from here to the very gate of the mount will be dangerous. Therefore we must return some other way."

"What other way *is* there?" asked Lady Claire, and her mother broke into a fit of weeping, crying out that they never should have come, and that now they could never succeed in returning.

"Oh, my daughter," she wept. "We shall be wanderers upon the face of the earth."

"Silence, Mother," whispered Lady Claire. "The English may be near us, and your weeping may lead them to us."

"Oh, oh, oh," wailed the Countess. "And we have only a squire and a fisherboy to protect us. We are lost!"

Lady Claire spoke sharply.

"Stop!" she ordered. "I will not listen to such words. Already these two brave men have saved us from the peril that threatened. We can at least try now to aid them."

The Countess fell to weeping silently but no longer did she endeavor to speak. Thus Philippe and Edmond, with an occasional comment from Lady Claire, talked over their predicament.

"We must not return the way we came," remarked Edmond.

"True," admitted Philippe, "but what other way is there?"

"Only one," explained Edmond, "and it presents its difficulties, although, with care, it should be safe."

"What is it?" asked Lady Claire.

For a moment Edmond sat silent, thinking out the details of the plan he had in mind.

"If they are searching for us," he began, "they will most certainly search back toward Pontorson. Therefore we must go the other way."

"Farther away from Mont St. Michel?" the girl asked.

"No, my lady," went on Edmond. "When you left the mount, you traveled south as far as Pontorson. There you crossed the bridge, and the road that you took led you to the northwest. St. Georges lies along that road about two miles from Pontorson, and from St. Georges to the mount the distance, as the crow might fly, is less than from Pontorson to the mount. Already, since we left the road, I have led you full half-way to St. Georges, in a direction that they are not like to look for us. And now, methinks, we can go toward the road once more, and, by being careful, can probably cross it safely.

From there it is but a little way to the sands—a mile perhaps, and then we shall be safe, save only for one thing."

"What is that?" asked Philippe.

"The river lies between us and the mount," replied Edmond.

"Is it deep?"

"Not on the sands. But in the dark it is hard to tell where one is on the sands, and though the river might well be waded, there are quicksands to be avoided. We shall travel slowly, at best, but I can lead the way and go ahead alone, thus warning you if I come upon the quicksands."

"You are brave to offer it, Edmond," whispered Lady Claire.

"It is nothing, my lady," replied the young man. "But one thing more I must warn you against."

"What?"

"There is no cover upon the sands, and we are not like to reach the mount before dawn. Then, if the sun rises while still we are far away from the walls, the English may see us, and then we shall be lost."

For a moment the three remained silent in the darkness.

"I can think of no other way," remarked Edmond.

"Nor I," admitted Philippe.

"Then let us go," suggested Lady Claire.

"We must travel rapidly," Edmond warned.

"We shall," replied the girl. "Lead the way, Edmond. I shall lead mother and the maids. Philippe shall bring up the rear."

For more than half an hour they stumbled through the night, finding a smooth way here and there where they could go rapidly—climbing a wall now and then. Before ten minutes had passed they reached the road, and though they lay beside it for full five precious minutes, not a sound came to their ears. Where the men who had taken part in the fight had gone they could not tell. They were nearly a mile from the scene of

the skirmish, of course, but the silence suggested that the search had, as Edmond had surmised, gone the other way. Nor were there any hedgerows where they lay, but when they felt certain that no danger lay about, they hurried across the road, climbed the stone wall on its farther side, and made their way across a field. Another mile they stumbled, and found themselves at the edge of the sands of the Bay of St. Michel.

By now, they felt certain, they had left their pursuers far behind; but still the danger of quicksands lay ahead, and for a time they talked in whispers as they stood in the shelter of a gnarled old tree.

"Oh, I cannot do it," quavered the Countess. "The quicksands—oh, I cannot. To think of being caught in them—cold, wet, dark! To sink beneath them and die. No, no, I cannot! Rather a thousand times would I face even the English. I have gone as far as I can. Not another step. Leave me if you will. I will not go upon the sands."

Edmond drew Philippe aside.

"Do you keep guard of them here, Master Philippe," he suggested, "and I shall go alone. Let us find a place where you and they can take cover against the possibility of being seen when the dawn comes. I will cross the sands, and when the tide has come, I will return with my boat, and take you all in safety to the mount."

"But the quicksands, Edmond," objected Philippe. "You should not go alone among the quicksands. One to lead, and another to follow lest the leader be engulfed and require aid—that is the rule of those who go among the quicksands, and well you know it."

"Ay, I know it," admitted Edmond. "But there is no one to follow. You must stay to protect our charges. Only I can go."

They heard a rustle from nearby, and Lady Claire joined them.

"*I* will go with you, Edmond," she said softly. "Come. We have no time to lose."

And despite both Philippe's and Edmond's arguments, she insisted that she go.

They found a sheltered spot surrounded by rocks, where those who remained would not be visible from the land side when the dawn came, and after Edmond had cautioned Lady Claire to follow him carefully at a distance of twenty feet or so, the two set off without another word.

From where they had reached the edge of the sands it was full four miles to the walls of Mont St. Michel, and for the first two miles they walked rapidly. Well Edmond knew that in that portion of the sands no dangers awaited them. But finally he felt the moister sands beneath his feet.

They could not be far from where the Couesnon made its way when the tide was out, and along the river's shallow course were the quicksands—invisible in the dark. But not for nothing had Edmond wandered about the sands since he had been a child. He knew how the quicksands felt beneath his feet, for many a time he had tested them about their edges. And now he walked more slowly, testing each step before he risked moving ahead.

He heard Lady Claire following behind; she had come closer to him without realizing the danger.

"Lady Claire," he warned, "take care! From here on for half a mile or so we must take care. We are nearing the river, and all about are quicksands. Do you stand where you are until I call to you. Then come toward me, for I shall be upon firm sands each time I call."

"I shall wait," she agreed. "But if you chance to walk into the quicksands, what shall I do?"

"Nothing, my lady," he replied. "If I get me in, I shall get

me out again! I would not have you take the risk of aiding me."

She did not reply for a moment. She had insisted on going with him in order to be of help, and now he proposed that she refrain from helping. She decided that she would not do as he said, but she did not argue.

"Very well," she replied. "I shall follow only when you call."

Slowly Edmond picked his way forward. Thirty short steps he took, perhaps, and found himself still on sands which, though they were wet, supported him.

"Come, Lady Claire," he called, and presently she stood beside him.

Again and again they repeated that slow process, and finally Edmond felt the shallow waters of the river as they spread thinly over the sands. He called to Lady Claire, and together they stood where the water lapped gently against their feet.

"Do you wait here, my lady," suggested Edmond. "I shall cross the stream, and when I have reached its other side I shall return for you, having thus made certain that no quicksands lie in our path."

"How wide is the stream?" she asked.

"I know not," he admitted. "In some places it is narrow enough—fifty yards, perhaps, or less. Elsewhere it spreads much more widely. I cannot tell, for I know not exactly where we are."

"Then go," she replied, "but carefully, and call me if you need my aid."

She stood listening to his footsteps in the water as he advanced slowly through the darkness. A step at a time he took, testing the sand ere he put his weight upon his advanced foot. More and more faintly could she hear him as he went on

through the night, and finally the sounds of his movements were lost to her.

She was tired—dreadfully tired—but she listened eagerly. She saw that the eastern sky had begun very faintly to pale. She watched the slowly growing light, eager to have it come so that it might show them the way to the protection of Mont St. Michel, and yet she was fearful that the coming of the dawn might give some of the wandering English a sight of them there upon the sands.

The eastern sky grew very slowly gray, though still the darkness hung oppressively over the sands upon which she waited. She listened tensely for some sound of Edmond's movements, but none came to her, and for a moment she had turned her eyes toward the east once more when suddenly she heard a splash.

She tensed herself quickly and strained her ears. Silence followed, and then another splash. She heard other sounds that she could not interpret, but somehow she knew that Edmond was struggling for his life out there in the quicksands and the shallow water.

"Edmond!" she called, but the only reply that came to her were other sounds of struggle.

"Edmond!" she cried again. "I am coming!"

"Stay where you are," came his faint reply, but she paid no heed to it. She ran splashing through the shallows. Still the sounds she dreaded came to her ears—clearer now, for she was coming closer.

"Edmond!" she cried again.

"Stop!" came his reply. "No nearer, for the love of St. Michael. The quicksands!"

Suddenly she stopped. To hurry on was only to sink in them herself. She must advance slowly. Carefully now she crept forward. The sounds were within a few feet now, and in the

faint light of the coming dawn she could see a vague shadow before her that moved in unison to the sounds she heard.

One of her feet suddenly sank beneath the sand, and quickly she slipped back. The edge of the danger spot was there. What could she do? Without a word Edmond was struggling for his life there just beyond her reach. She quivered with fear, and then tore off the riding cloak she wore. She threw herself to her hands and knees, and heedless of her trailing skirt in the water, she crept forward. One arm sank in the sands halfway to her elbow and she drew back.

"Edmond," she cried. "Seize my cloak."

Holding tightly to it she whipped its soaked folds out before her. It splashed into the water and she heard the tinkle of the drops that flew from it as, for a moment, Edmond's struggles ceased.

"I cannot reach it," came his voice, husky with the strain he struggled under.

She drew it back and whipped it forward once again. She leaned forward farther now, her arm and hand buried in the sands to her elbow. She felt a tug upon the cloak, and grimly held to the garment that now had reached her struggling guide. Her nails seemed almost to be torn from her fingers as she gripped the straining garment. Edmond was pulling lustily on it now, and she could hardly maintain her hold. She clenched her teeth and held on with all her strength, and suddenly she knew that the strain had slackened. Was he losing his strength, or had he pulled himself free? She did not know. Her eyes went black, and she seemed on the very verge of fainting, when suddenly she saw Edmond rise beside her, felt him as he lifted her to her feet, knew that she was being helped back from the dreadful edge of that terrible trap of sand.

For a moment she stood weakly as she rested against him, and suddenly she straightened.

She whipped its soiled folds out before her.

"Good," she remarked. "And now what shall we do?"

Silently he led her—somewhere. She did not know in which direction, and did not seem to care. Finally he stopped and she realized that they were no longer standing in the water.

"We have crossed the worst of it," said the young man. "And, Lady Claire, I owe you that which I never can repay."

"Owe me?" she asked, puzzled.

"Ay, my lady," he replied. "You saved my life."

"Did I so?" she asked, and Edmond, in the faint light of the dawn could see her smile. "That is strange," she went on. "Yet it is fitting, for you saved me this night."

They walked forward arm in arm, and now, with the east all pink and rose and gold, they could see the towering island but a little way ahead. They could even hear the drawbridge as it

"I cannot reach it," came his voice.

fell across the moat, and as the fishermen came trooping through the gate, the two staggered toward it across the sands, while far away, where the road from Pontorson came out upon the sands, the amazed guard in the watchman's tower spied a little body of horsemen, with whom limped several men on foot, making their slow way toward the mount.

A score of willing men-at-arms and fishermen came running toward Lady Claire and Edmond as, wet and torn and dirty and bedraggled, they came staggering toward the gate, and as they came Lady Claire's knees suddenly gave way. Edmond tried to hold her up, but his strength had gone. He felt someone trying to help him, and he shook his head.

"Aid Lady Claire," he told them, and did not know how weak his voice was. "Aid her. I am well enough."

Vaguely he saw two men lift the little lady and carry her toward the gate. He gazed after her, puzzled that she had not spoken. But it was all right. He saw them carry her through the gate, and knew that she was safe.

Now he was being helped after her, and suddenly he saw that Sir Louis d'Estouteville stood before him. The knight was speaking, too, but somehow his words did not seem clear.

"My boat," said Edmond, not knowing what else to say. "My boat. I must go with it when the tide has come. Master Philippe awaits with my lady the Countess du Val."

"Waits?" demanded Sir Louis. "Waits where?"

"Across the sands," replied Edmond. "I told them I would bring the boat. They must be saved from the English."

"The English?" demanded Sir Louis. "Were you attacked?"

"Ay, my lord," replied Edmond.

"Where? How? With what result?" demanded the knight.

But before Edmond, in his weariness, could answer, a guard came running.

"My lord," he cried, "my lord du Brée and seven men are coming now across the sands. They seem to be wounded and worn."

"Du Brée?" asked Sir Louis. "Take this man-at-arms and give him food. Let him rest. I must talk with him as soon as he can talk."

Within two hours the sands had disappeared, and all across them the waters glinted in the sunlight. Edmond, tired and worn still, but more clear-minded now, sat in the stern of a boat—the boat of Jacques the fisherman—and four brawny men rowed it toward the shore where Philippe awaited them with the Countess du Val and the two maids. Almost up to their rocky shelter the boat was rowed, and while the Countess

excitedly gave thanks to St. Michael, the boat returned across the waters to the King's Gate.

Long since, du Brée had told his story to Sir Louis, laying all the blame for his defeat upon Edmond. Lady Claire, too, had told her story. Now, when Edmond stepped once more upon the sands before the King's Gate, it was to be ordered to report at once, with Master Philippe, to Sir Louis's quarters within the Abbey barbican.

When the two appeared, Sir Louis coldly looked toward the squire.

"Master Philippe," he demanded, "tell me the story of what took place."

He listened patiently, his face stern and emotionless. Nor did he say a word for a full minute after the squire had finished. Only then did he turn toward Edmond.

"Sirrah," he began, his voice hard and his brow furrowed, "how does it come that you left the mount without permission?"

Edmond stared in surprise. He had not thought of that, so filled with action had the whole night been.

"Why—why—my lord," he stammered. "I know not."

"You know not?" demanded Sir Louis. "Do you not know that no one may leave the city after dark save by my own express permission?"

"Ay—ay, my lord. I know it."

"Then you disobeyed my orders."

"Yes, my lord."

"Why?"

For a moment Edmond could not reply. Why? Why had he left?

He started suddenly to speak without knowing what he said.

"I had hoped, my lord, to go as a man-at-arms with Lady Claire and Master Philippe. But I was not chosen. So being

off duty until noon today, and being in the gatehouse as they left, I bethought me that I might walk unknown before them until they were safe in Brittany. And so I went. I meant no harm, my lord."

"You meant no harm," repeated Sir Louis. "I doubt it not. Yet you broke my own express command. You shall be punished. Guards, take him to the dungeons. Thirty days therein is the punishment for such a crime."

Edmond blinked in surprise. It seemed that the punishment was over-severe in the circumstances, but he made no effort to resist as the guards laid their hands upon his arms.

"But hold," went on Sir Louis. "Have you naught to say in your own behalf?"

"Naught, my lord."

"But Lady Claire and Master Philippe have told me that at great risk to your own life you saved theirs."

"I only did what I could, my lord."

"And what you did was well done. For your offense, I sentence you to thirty days in the dungeon on bread and water. For what you have done to save those whom you saved, I shall reward you! I am setting aside your punishment, and order you now to rest. When you have slept, hold yourself in readiness to share the watch with Robert le Sagittaire at the King's Gate. Mont St. Michel has need of men who do their duty without command."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

BOLTS AND LOCKS

FOLLOWING the unsuccessful attempt of the Countess du Val and Lady Claire to leave Mont St. Michel for the safer lands beyond the River Loire, the English abruptly changed their tactics. Where, before, they had troubled Mont St. Michel almost not at all, save as they overran the mainland and interfered with the activities of the island people when they had crossed the sands, now they drew their lines more closely about the mount. English men-at-arms constantly guarded the road that led to Beauvoir and Pontorson, and constant raids were made against the island fishermen when the tide was high. Boats laden with English archers were forever making their way about the fishing grounds, driving the fishermen in to take protection behind the walls—capturing one now and then, and brutally hanging those they captured. Sometimes, too, an unlucky fisherman, who had remained out too long when the archers were approaching, was killed by arrows, and had his boat taken off to Tombelaine to aid still other archers to harry other fishermen. More than often enough other fishermen, who had been pursued by archers, came rowing madly in with arrows sunk inches deep in the planks of which their boats were built.

That the English, at Robert Jolivet's instigation, were trying to reduce the mount by famine was obvious, and for the better part of a year the attempt continued.

Edmond recalled the conversation he had overheard between

du Brée and Robert Jolivet. Du Brée had urged this method of attack, but as month after month passed by, the sturdy citizens of Mont St. Michel still resisted. Du Brée had said that a single month would starve the island into submission, but within the vast storerooms of the Abbey there was food in greater quantity than he realized. And more than that. Despite the pressure of the English the sturdy fishermen caught their fish and brought them into the city. It was more difficult, of course, and during the light of day little fishing could be done save near the island where the fishermen were safe enough.

But as the pressure of the siege redoubled, and the pinch of hunger began to make itself felt, the fishermen sometimes set forth upon the tides that swept across the sands at night, and sailing far out to sea remained beyond the sight of the enemy on Tombelaine, only to return the next night or the night following, with their boats heavily laden with the important food. Thus they were able, sometimes, to bring in more food during the height of the siege than they had brought when the English had pressed less closely about the walls.

And now and again some group of fishermen, with monies entrusted to them by Prior Jean, made their way in their boats at night to St. Malo, and purchased there still other food which they brought back in order to replenish the shrinking supply within the cellars of the Abbey.

Thus the enemy failed utterly to starve the island city, and thus Robert Jolivet, from his headquarters at Tombelaine, planned and planned again, but still without success.

In the meantime conditions remained much the same within the walls of Mont St. Michel. Lady Claire and her mother did not dream of making another attempt to escape, and when Philippe suggested that they go to St. Malo some night with the fishermen, they did not take the matter seriously, for upon the very next attempt, the unlucky fishermen, who had gone,

were wrecked upon the rocky shores of their own island when they returned—were wrecked and drowned within the very hearing of their friends when a sudden gale set all the Bay of St. Michel to roaring and foaming in the night—when the wind shrieked and moaned about the Abbey walls, and swept heavily across the ramparts, laden with spray torn from the tortured sea.

The winter came, and with it came the storms and fogs and gales that make winter along that rocky coast a thing of misery—cheerless and cold and damp. The great and drafty rooms of the Abbey were left to themselves while the monks huddled together for warmth in the smaller rooms where the heat from the fireplaces made some impression on the temperature. The huge fireplaces of the great guests' room were useless, for no matter how fierce a blaze roared on the hearth, it served only to scorch the faces of those who clustered round, while the cold of the long and gracefully arched room hung upon their backs and made them shiver despite the heat.

Edmond stood his watch with Robert le Sagittaire at the King's Gate, and spent his spare time practising at martial exercises, or talking with his father in their little room across from the watchman's tower.

No longer was Edmond a fledgling man-at-arms. Sir Louis, grim as he was, treated the young man with much the same consideration that he showed to Robert le Sagittaire himself. And before the winter was half over he elevated Edmond yet once again when he was taken from his duty with Robert, and given the responsibility of guarding the gate when Robert was off duty.

Thus, with two other men-at-arms as his assistants, Edmond spent two six-hour watches each day at the gate, relieving Robert le Sagittaire and being relieved by him in turn. And jealous though some of the older men-at-arms were of him, he was rec-

ognized as being, in Sir Louis's eyes, second only to Robert himself among all the common soldiers of the mount. From a simple fisherboy, Edmond had come to be in six months' time, the second man-at-arms of Mont St. Michel, and shared with Robert le Sagittaire the grave and important duty of guarding the only entrance to the walled city of the island—the only way by which any person might come from or go to the Abbey on the mount. No more did the young man have to give ground to every other soul in the little island city. Now only the prior, the captain of the guard, and those other few of gentle blood who dwelt there were more important than he.

Philippe came often to the yard set aside for martial practice and there practised with Edmond—perfecting his swordsmanship, adding to his knowledge of martial matters, explaining the intricacies of war. Lady Claire, too, now busy once again among the poor of the little city, sometimes came and watched as Philippe and Edmond contended with their swords and bucklers.

The Abbey was open now to Edmond. Often he was called to the Belle Chaise, just within the Abbey barbican, where Sir Louis had his headquarters. Nearly every day now he trudged the length of the narrow street, mounted the twelve flights of stairs that lay between the end of the street and the Abbey barbican, passed beneath the heavy, sword-studded portcullis, stooped to pass through the low wicket that lay beyond it, and entered Sir Louis's room.

Often he saw the huddle of mendicants clustered on the terrace outside the Abbey hostelry, squatting on their haunches with their porridge bowls in their hands, waiting patiently while Brother Joseph poured or ladled out the food for which they came. Now and again he was taken by this monk or that to the Abbey church where still the choir that had collapsed was temporarily closed, and from there was taken through the deli-

cately beautiful cloister, the most beautiful in all France; through the refectory, with its arched ceiling and its fifty-five beautiful windows recessed far into the ponderous walls of the towering Merveille. Never had he thought, when as a boy he had sat among the trees at the foot of the giant wall of that extraordinary building, that the time would come when he would be led intimately through its vast and beautiful rooms by the monks themselves. Each time he visited the marvelous hall that lies beneath the cloister—the hall of the four beautifully vaulted aisles—he fairly gasped. Such beauty in the gorgeous glass of the windows! Such beauty in the score of columns from which the vaultings of the ceiling spring! He often stood for minutes at a time drinking in the perfection of that place. Sometimes he was led from this splendid hall down through the heavily arched cellar, and finally, by way of a terrace hung on the steep side of the mount, to the dungeons which lie deep within the very rock from which the Abbey rises.

He shuddered at their blackness and their power. No mere walls of stone surrounded them. The living rock of the little mountain served to wall them in, and once a man was thrust therein—once the key was turned and the ponderous lock clanged shut—no power on earth seemed great enough to free him. On one occasion, a door was opened by the turnkey—a torch was thrust into a dismal dungeon—and Edmond saw a horrid sight. A man, pale and hairy, crouched beside the wall, his eyes brilliant, his long beard matted. In his huge hands he held a bone on which he had been gnawing, and as the light shone through the door, a score of rats ran pattering and squeaking into the shadows. The man bared his teeth in fury for a moment and then leaped to his feet with a scream of rage. He threw the bone with all his force, and, as the turnkey pulled the door suddenly shut, the bone crashed loudly against it.

Edmond shrank back.

"Who is he?" he gasped. "What has he done?"

"I know not," replied his guide. "He was here before I came ten years ago. I never heard his name, nor yet his crime. We dare go no farther than the door. Methinks that Satan himself must be within him, for even holy water—even a crucifix itself—does not serve to quiet him."

Edmond shrank in terror from the fearful place, glad to gain the clear air and light of heaven once again, and to rid his nostrils of the hideous odor of that foul and reeking place. How strange that that one edifice could house within its walls both the perfect beauty of the great halls of the Merveille, and the ghastly horror of those foul dungeons!

Sir Clément du Brée, during all this time, seemed to draw more within himself. He had been slightly wounded on that night when Edmond had led Lady Claire and the others from the ambush of the English, wounded as if by a pike, which, thrust hard against his side, had dented his armor and cut through it for a little way. The wound had not been serious, but what with the loss of blood and the rage that had swept over him at the outcome of the affair, he had, for a month, been kept to his bed, where the barber-surgeon of Mont St. Michel visited him day after day, bleeding him each time his fever rose, and poulticing him in between. So Sir Clément, when he regained his feet once more, was a pale and weakened man, whose duties were lightened by Sir Louis until he should be strong again.

But winter had come before his strength returned, and then a cold put him to bed again; and the barber-surgeon, true to the only treatment he knew, bled the knight again, until, when the cold had worn away, Sir Clément was once more a weakened man, fit only to sit beside his fireplace and glower at the flames.

Nor did the scant food that was all that was available, help

him rapidly to recover his strength, with the result that spring had come before he was strong and fit once more.

Consequently Edmond saw little enough of the young nobleman until the flowers were growing brightly in the crannies of the rocky island—until the leaves had come again to clothe the trees on the island's northern side—until Edmond himself had had time enough in which to become, in mind as well as body, a sturdy, honest man-at-arms, capable and eager to perform his duties.

It is not at all unlikely that had du Brée not been kept within the island's walls by the barber-surgeon's bleedings, events might well have taken another course. But as it was, all that bleak winter of 1433–4 saw du Brée unable to take more than a minor part in the affairs of Mont St. Michel, and such was his weakness that he could not have made the journey safely from Mont St. Michel to Tombelaine even had Sir Louis given him permission.

But when spring came again and brought balmy breezes and quiet sunny days, Sir Clément gradually regained his strength, and set about laying his plans for another visit to Tombelaine, for he had had no word from Robert Jolivet since his last visit to the English stronghold ten long months before.

Had he realized how furious Jolivet was because of his failure promptly to capture Mont St. Michel, du Brée might have been even more desirous of crossing the sands to confer with him. Had he known how often Jolivet had wondered why he had never returned, he might have hurried his plans more even than he did. For Robert Jolivet had no means of knowing whether du Brée had had a change of heart and had consequently given up his treachery, or whether his visits to Tombelaine had been discovered, thus leading the young knight to some dungeon deep within the Abbey's rock foundation.

Still, though none of this knowledge could have come to the knight, he knew perfectly that Jolivet still needed him, and so, early in the month of May, set himself the task of planning how he could make some excuse to leave the island city in order to journey through the night across the sands. Nor did he have any great difficulty in finding an opportunity.

During the winter the gales and fogs had made it almost impossible for ships to bring supplies to Tombelaine, with the result that what had been required had come, laboriously, overland from Harfleur to Avranches and thence to the island stronghold. But now that pleasant weather had come once more, a small fleet of supply ships appeared far out upon the blue waters of the English Channel, and in plain sight of the watchmen on Mont St. Michel's North Tower, sailed slowly in until they lay within the shelter of the Cape of Andaine which lies as far to the north of Tombelaine as Tombelaine lies to the north of Mont St. Michel.

Du Brée, with Sir Louis and a dozen others, watched the ships as they came in on the flowing tide, but look though they would, the distance was too great for them to make out why the ships had come.

"More soldiers," remarked du Brée, as if to himself, as he stood beside Sir Louis and gazed out across the parapet of the great North Tower.

"Not likely," commented Sir Louis. "They bring supplies, probably."

Du Brée knew as well as did Sir Louis that what the captain said was true, but it was his task to create doubt in the captain's mind.

"They bring their supplies from Avranches, across the sands," he replied. "Why should they send such a fleet of ships for that task? I suspect that those ships have come from Southampton with fresh men. They have spent the

better part of a year trying to starve us into submission, and they have failed. So it is likely, now that the winter gales have passed, that they are gathering more men in order to take the mount by assault."

"They are not likely to succeed," remarked Sir Louis. "To take such walls as these by assault has rarely enough been done."

Du Brée nodded.

"True enough," he agreed. "But how many men have they? Five thousand? Perhaps. Now suppose that these ships have brought another thousand. Suppose they gather together the companies that are scattered all about this region; that will add, say, another thousand. Seven thousand men. And suppose that these ships have brought cannon.

"Seven thousand men, with, let us say, a score of cannon to aid them. What can we do if they bring their cannon out upon the sands and bombard our walls from such a distance as will keep them safe from our crossbows and our trébuchets? What can we do? They can reduce a section of our wall to rubble, and then with seven thousand men they can carry it by assault, for what can we do with fourteen score men to beat back seven thousand?"

Sir Louis grunted.

"Your sickness has made you singularly apprehensive," he remarked. "They are not like to gather together seven thousand men."

Du Brée laughed coldly.

"Nor do they need them," he replied. "If they have cannon —and I do not doubt they have, for every report that comes to our ears contains some mention of the use of these new weapons —if they have them, I say, *two* thousand men is all they need, for once our walls are battered down that number easily can overpower us."

Sir Louis still stood staring out across the sands toward where the ships were making their slow way along.

"What you say has truth in it," he admitted. "But what can we do? It were best, perhaps, to send a man to spy upon them tonight. Perhaps we may be able to learn whether or not they have cannon. I do not fear mere men, but cannon are another matter. I have no experience with them. If we are like to have them blowing their stones against our walls, 'twere well, perhaps, to strengthen those places they are likeliest to attack."

Du Brée nodded.

"It would be wise," he agreed. "But let us try to learn whether or not they have cannon. With your permission I shall go tonight across the sands again."

"Are you strong enough to go?"

Du Brée laughed.

" 'Tis an easy walk," he replied.

"But can you do it?" asked Sir Louis. "I would not have you fall into their hands."

"There is little danger," returned du Brée, "and it may be I can gain some information that will be of value."

"But you must not go alone," went on Sir Louis.

"Nay, I prefer to go alone." Du Brée shook his head. "I know that I can be silent, and I need not talk when I am on the sands alone. Another with me will but complicate the matter. If I am not successful, another can try his hand later."

The night had come, and the night tide had once more ebbed, leaving the way clear from Mont St. Michel to Tombelaine. At the King's Gate Edmond and his two assistants paced back and forth, or sat within the arch and talked of martial matters. Months of experience in guarding the King's Gate had given Edmond confidence in himself, and no soldier in all Mont St. Michel carried himself better. Still, but less often, he thought

of Sir Clément du Brée and that night nearly a year before when the knight had talked with Robert Jolivet in the low ceiled room on Tombelaine. Though he had said no word of it to anyone but Arnaud, the young man-at-arms was more than ever convinced that, somehow, Sir Clément had had a hand in planning that ambush on the hedged and narrow road. The wound with which Sir Clément had returned, the young man-at-arms still believed, had been caused by Edmond's own pike when Sir Clément, for some reason known only to himself, had tried to lead Lady Claire into the very midst of that furious skirmish in the dark. Since that fierce little battle in the dark, however, Edmond had carefully watched du Brée's every move, and he felt certain that there had been no further treachery. He wondered if he would ever, now, have reason to tell of his own adventure on Tombelaine.

He heard footsteps in the narrow little street and called his men. Well he knew that Sir Louis might appear at any time—night or day—to inspect the guard, and the young man-at-arms was not to be caught napping. Nor was he surprised to see, by the faint light of the torch, that it was Sir Louis who was approaching. It was surprising, though, that Sir Clément was with him, although the young knight had, of late, been more active in his duties about the little city than he had been all winter. Edmond and the other men-at-arms stood rigidly at attention, as Sir Louis and his companion approached, expecting nothing more than the usual inspection. But instead of that Sir Louis gave an order.

"Open the gate and lower the drawbridge," he commanded.

Edmond saluted.

"At once, my lord," he replied.

He called to the guard whose post was at the little window over the gateway.

"Is all clear upon the sands?"

"All clear," came the reply.

"All clear," came another voice from the watchman's tower.

"Open the gate," ordered Edmond, and his two assistants disappeared into the darkness of the arch. The heavy bolts clanged back, the locks clicked, and the creaking of the hinges told that the gate was being swung back.

Edmond waited until its two ponderous halves were open wide.

"Raise the portcullis," he ordered.

The men disappeared into the gatehouse, and presently came the clanking sounds of chains as the heavy portcullis slid up into the darkness above the arch.

"Lower the drawbridge," came Edmond's voice, and in a moment the thunder of the heavy chains rumbled through the arch, followed by the sound of the heavy oaken timbers alighting on the stone supports beyond the moat.

Sir Louis turned to du Brée.

"How long will you be gone?" he asked.

"Perhaps for three hours," replied the knight.

Sir Louis beckoned to Edmond.

"Sir Clément du Brée goes to spy upon the English," he explained. "Watch for his return three hours hence. Call me when he has returned, and do not open the gate until I come."

Edmond almost gasped. Du Brée was going out upon the sands again, to visit Tombelaine without a doubt—to plan with Robert Jolivet—to try and bring about the fall of the city and the Abbey of Mont St. Michel.

Without realizing what he did, Edmond had already replied.

"Yes, my lord," he had said, and now he wondered what he ought to do. Sir Louis had wished Sir Clément well, and the knight was even now crossing the drawbridge.

"My lord," whispered Edmond, and Sir Louis turned toward him.

"Yes. Speak," replied Sir Louis.

"Let me follow after my lord du Brée," begged Edmond.

"He wants no companion," replied Sir Louis.

"Ay, my lord," whispered Edmond. "I know right well he does not. But let me follow him. He goes to Tombelaine to confer again with Robert Jolivet—to plan the downfall of Mont St. Michel—to—"

"What villainy are you talking?" roared Sir Louis. "You question the honor of a nobleman and a knight? By St. Michael, I have treated you too well."

"Nay, Sir Louis," replied the boy, "I know whereof I speak. I followed him, nearly a year ago, and overheard him talking within the walls of Tombelaine. I—"

"Stop!" shouted Sir Louis. "Have you lost your mind?"

"No, no, my lord, I heard him. I swear by St. Michael—"

By now the two guards had overheard this strange conversation, and heedless of the fact that the gate stood open wide, they had turned with open mouths to listen.

"Raise the drawbridge," roared Sir Louis. "Close the gate."

The men hurried to do as they were told, and Edmond tried again to speak.

"Silence, sirrah!" cried Sir Louis. "Not another word. Such insolence is insupportable!"

The drawbridge stood upright once more against the wall. The portcullis rattled down. The gate swung shut to the sound of bolts and locks.

"Guards!" roared Sir Louis.

Both men appeared at once from out the darkened arch.

"Take this man's weapons and his armor from him."

The guards blinked in amazement, and Edmond, making no move to protect himself, felt their nervous hands upon him. His belt and sword were taken from him. His pike was taken

from his hand. His shirt of linked steel was stripped from his back.

"Call aid," ordered Sir Louis, "and send this man to the Abbey dungeons. I shall deal with him tomorrow."

CHAPTER TWELVE

WITHIN THE ABBEY DUNGEONS

THERE was a delay of five or ten long minutes, that seemed to Edmond to be as many years. How proud he had been of his position of responsibility—of his weapons and his armor—of his carriage and his soldier's work. And now all these were gone. His weapons taken from him, his armor stripped from off his back, and the two men who had been his subordinates now were nervously holding him tightly by the arms as if he might make an effort to escape—holding him in order to turn him over to some other one of his companions who would lead him up the dark and narrow street, up the twelve flights of stairs, through the Abbey barbican, and thence into the dark corridors that led to those awful, noisome dungeons, that lay beneath the Abbey within the very rock itself.

Now no less a person than Robert le Sagittaire himself appeared, to whom Sir Louis repeated his stern orders. Then, with Robert's hand laid lightly on his shoulder, Edmond marched off up the hill into the night.

For a time neither said a word, but finally Robert glanced back, and seeing that Sir Louis stood where they had left him, shook Edmond gently, and spoke.

"What is amiss, Edmond?" he asked suddenly. "Why are you sent to the dungeons?"

Edmond hesitated. He had spoken to Sir Louis because he felt that the time had come when he must speak. Now, were he left to rot within the dungeon, no one would know, for Sir

Louis had not believed him. But Robert—here was one whom he could trust, one who would believe. He would tell him the whole story.

"Robert," he whispered eagerly, "walk slowly and I shall tell you. Someone must know, and better you than anyone else here at Mont St. Michel."

"Then speak," ordered Robert, and instantly Edmond launched forth into his account. He told of sighting the English fleet—of questioning Sir Clément's honesty—of following him across the sands. No mention did he make of his father, for he feared that somehow Arnaud might be punished for his part in the affair. But other than that he told everything. He described his adventure on the walls of Tombelaine. He told what he had overheard as he clung within the soot-lined chimney—of how he had escaped. He told of finding Sir Clement's footprints on the sand—footprints that led toward Tombelaine when the knight had said that he had gone to Pontorson. He told of the skirmish in the dark and of the blow that he had given—of his belief that the man he had struck had been Sir Clément himself. And finally he finished.

"That is the story, Robert. That is all of it," he went on. "And I swear by St. Michael that every word is true. Thus, when my lord du Brée went forth upon the sands just now, I knew that he was going once again to talk with Robert Jolivet, and so it was I told Sir Louis. But I might well have known. It is as I had always feared. No person so lowly as I may say a word against a nobleman. And here am I, on my way to a dungeon for trying to save Mont St. Michel from treachery!"

They had climbed full half the steps of the Great Outer Stairway when he finished, and Robert, for a moment, did not reply. He merely blew a long, low whistle of amazement. But before they had climbed a dozen more steps the man-at-arms spoke.

"'Tis a most amazing story, Edmond," he whispered, "yet do I believe every word of it. What I can do in your behalf I do not know. But trust me: what I can do I *shall* do. Somehow, mayhap, I'll get you clear of this. And this traitor knight du Brée—I'll watch him. Ay, I'll watch him. So long as you are in your dungeon ne'er a treacherous breath will he be able to draw that Robert le Sagittaire will not know of it."

"Halt!" came the command of the guard above them on the stair. "Who goes there?"

"Robert le Sagittaire," replied the man-at-arms, "with a prisoner for the dungeons."

Ten minutes later, having been passed from surprised guard to surprised guard, Edmond fell, at last, into the hands of the dungeon turnkey—the very man who, nearly a year before, had been struck to the ground by the blow of Edmond's strangely weighted sword when the two had faced each other in the tilt yard.

"Oh, oh, my fledgling," laughed the fellow. "Sir Louis sends you to the dungeons, eh? Ah, 'tis well. They are more than usually well filled, but I know of one. 'Tis strong and dark and nicely filled with rats, and for some years has had within it only one lone prisoner, for we dare not enter it lest he tear us into bits. Still, there is room there, if he will but give way a little."

Edmond shuddered but did not reply, and, being shoved heavily from behind by the turnkey, he made his way along the dark and narrow passage, turned a corner, and finally, roared at from behind, turned into yet another passage narrow and low and dank.

"Here we are, my fledgling," roared the guard. "Hold! I shall open this handsome state apartment for you."

He fumbled with his heavy ring of keys, chose one, and turned the lock. The door creaked dismally on its rusty hinges

and swung open. Roughly the guard shoved Edmond through, and even as he did so, the light from his dim horn lantern fell upon the matted beard and the white face, the heavy body and the huge hands of that terrible creature Edmond had seen once before—seen within that very dungeon.

The prisoner leaped to his feet with a roar of rage, and flung himself at the door, but the guard had pulled it clanging shut. The prisoner pounded at it and roared with rage, but from outside came only the guard's horrid laugh as he shot the bolt.

"Good night, my children!" he called mockingly. "Sweet dreams!"

Edmond heard his footsteps growing faint as he strode off down the passage, while still the other prisoner pounded the door and growled his rage.

When the light had fallen on the older prisoner and Edmond had seen the fellow leap for the door, he had been horrified. He had see the man before, it is true, but he had not realized how huge and broad and tall he was. Edmond was taller and more broad than almost any other man-at-arms in all the garrison of Mont St. Michel. But this huge fellow was infinitely greater and more powerful than was the young man. He stood a full head taller, and his shoulders were a span or more wider than were Edmond's. Never had the young man seen so huge a man. And so, as the fellow had leaped at the door, Edmond had shrunk back against the wall, certain, for a moment, that this terrible giant was about to tear him to bits. Even now he remained silent in the dark there against the cold stone, certain that he was about to feel the fellow's powerful hands about his throat.

For a minute or more the man stood pounding at the door and growling, but presently he stopped, and for another moment remained silent.

Ten minutes later, Edmond fell into the hands of the ***dungeon turnkey.***

"Who are you?" he asked suddenly, and Edmond was surprised at the gentleness of his voice.

"I am Edmond, the son of Arnaud the fisherman," the young man replied, wondering how to deal with this powerful prisoner with whom he was forced to share that black and evil-smelling dungeon.

"Edmond," repeated the man, "the son of Arnaud the fisherman. It seems to me that I remember a fisherman named Arnaud. He lived in a single room just within the King's Gate. He was married, it seems to me, but he had no son. Is he your father?"

"Yes."

"How old are you?"

"Nineteen."

"Nineteen?" repeated the man. "I wonder. How long I have been here I do not know. The sun never comes to tell me of the passing of time, but if I keep proper count of the years by watching when the guards are bundled up in winter and when they wear less when summer comes, then I have been here for more than nineteen years. And you, my boy, are the first person in all that time to share my cell with me."

"Who are you?" asked Edmond.

"Christophe is my name, boy. Have you never heard my story?"

"Christophe," echoed Edmond. "Perhaps I have heard of you. I have heard stories of a man-at-arms named Christophe who was stronger than any other three men, but he disappeared and never again returned."

"Disappeared?" asked Christophe. "Is that what they say of me? Yes, they might say that. Yes. It must be. Yes. Yes. I do not wonder, now that you tell me."

"Why are you here?" asked Edmond.

"Because I was honest, I believe," replied the fellow. "There was a villain in the Abbey named Robert Jolivet—"

"Robert Jolivet?" cried Edmond.

"Yes. Robert Jolivet. He was planning treachery with the English, and I learned of it. But he learned that I knew, and so he made me turnkey of the dungeons, and came with me one night as if to look at them. He took my keys and opened dungeon after dungeon until we came to this one, which was empty.

" 'Go within, Christophe,' he told me, 'and tell me what you find.' And when I came within, he slammed the door and locked it! And when the new turnkey came to look at me, lo, he was a man new to Mont St. Michel, and knew me not. And Robert Jolivet had warned him that I was a madman without a name—and I have been so ever since!"

"Then you are not mad?" asked Edmond.

The man laughed a mirthless chuckle.

"To be truthful, I know not. Perhaps I am, but I do not believe it. But this I do know: not a guard comes to this dungeon but believes it, for each time for many years that they have opened the door, I have made an effort of some kind to escape. And so they think me mad.—But tell me, why are you here? Tell me, too, some news of the outside world."

It was thus that Edmond became acquainted with this giant of the dungeon, and as the fellow, in twenty years or so, had never had word of the outside world, he had much to hear. For hours they talked, and in that time Edmond, having told what he could that Christophe seemed interested in hearing, asked questions of his own.

"But your strength," began the boy. "It cannot be what it once was. Cooped in this dungeon for twenty years, it must be that your strength has gone?"

Christophe chuckled.

"Give me your hand, boy," he commanded.

Edmond put forth his hand, and Christophe, finding it in the dark, placed it on his right arm and tensed his muscles.

"My strength gone?" he asked. "No. I think I have a little left."

Edmond's fingers felt the huge muscles harden and could not resist a cry of surprise. Larger than the muscles of his own leg were these of the giant's arm.

"Stand up, boy," Christophe went on.

Obediently Edmond stood, and Christophe, with one brawny ham of a hand, seized him by the back of his jacket and lifted him from the floor as Edmond might have lifted a kitten. With a playful shake that made Edmond's very teeth rattle, the giant set him down again.

"My strength gone?" he asked again. "No. I have some left. More, in fact, than I have shown."

"But how can that be?" asked Edmond. "What have you done to keep from growing weak?"

Christophe laughed.

"Every day, my boy, I have walked about this room. Ten paces wide, it is, and fourteen long—forty-eight paces around and as nearly as I can figure—and I have had time to figure—thirty-seven times around it make one mile. So every day since I have been here I have walked around this room three hundred and seventy times—ten miles. Often I have walked more, for whenever I lose the count I force myself to begin anew. Only last week I lost the count after I had passed three hundred and sixty, so beginning again made me walk twenty miles that day. And having done that I do this."

Edmond heard a sound of the man's movement, but in the darkness could see nothing. He heard a pattering on the stone floor that he could not identify.

"What are you doing?" he demanded.

Another sound followed, and Christophe laughed.

"I forgot that you could not see me," he explained. "I was but walking on my hands, and if I fail to go full twice around without falling, then I start anew."

"Then I see why you still are strong," replied the boy.

"Oh, that is only part of what I do," explained Christophe. "There are other things. But never since I have been here have I had stool or a chair, a bed or a table. I sleep on dirty straw without a blanket. I eat off the floor, for that is where they throw my food. For years my guards were so afraid of me that they never opened the door at all, but slid back the wicket and tossed the food through. And they were even afraid to do that after I reached through the wicket and tore the bars out. They called a dozen guards to hold me back with pikes while they closed the wicket with a plate of iron. And for several days they fed me not at all. That was, perhaps, four years ago, and I decided to improve my behavior, for it were better to have food, even from the floor, than to starve. Some day I shall escape from here, and shall need my strength. If only they would give me a table I could escape now—or I believe I could."

"Escape?" cried Edmond. "How?"

"Come with me," ordered Christophe.

Edmond followed the giant's footsteps in the dark, not knowing in which direction he was being led, but presently he felt himself standing beside Christophe, and putting out his hand felt the iron-barred oaken door that stood, three sturdy inches thick, between them and the narrow passageway outside.

"Look up," ordered Christophe.

Edmond stared above him in the darkness.

"I see nothing," he remarked.

"You cannot see it?" asked the giant.

"What is there to see?"

"A crack where the light enters. See it there? That is how I tell when morning comes. It is above the door—near the ceiling, full five feet above my reach when I have leaped my highest. You have not been in the dark so much as I have. I remember now that I did not see it for full three years after I was placed here."

"What would you do if you could reach it?"

"The crack is, I think, wide enough for me to put my hand therein," explained Christophe. "If I could do that, I could pull that block of masonry from out the wall—and with that for a beginning I could pull the wall down, or could use a block of stone to batter down the door."

"Could you do it?" asked Edmond in surprise.

"Certainly," replied Christophe. "'Tis only a question of reaching it. By St. Michael, boy, I have it! Stand here, now. Hold!"

Edmond suddenly felt the huge weight of the giant as the fellow climbed adeptly to the boy's shoulders. He heard the man's fingers searching about in the darkness overhead. Edmond stood unsteadily supporting the heavy weight, and suddenly noticed that the man's movements had ceased.

"What is wrong?" asked the boy.

"Sh!" warned Christophe. "Listen."

In another moment the giant was on the floor again, with his ear pressed tightly against the door.

"Listen!" he ordered again.

Robert le Sagittaire had pondered over Edmond's problem during all the rest of the six-hour watch that he had been ordered to finish in Edmond's place. Du Brée had returned at about the time he had mentioned, and had gone off with Sir Louis to report. Now and again, through the rest of the night, sentinels here and there upon the ramparts had chal-

lenged strange sounds that had come out of the darkness on the sands, but nothing else of importance had happened.

Then, as dawn came to gild the east and light the towers and roofs of Mont St. Michel again, a cry of fear came suddenly from the sentinel in the Watchman's Tower. Other cries from other guards followed, and in the faint light of the dim, gray morning, every pair of eyes upon Mont St. Michel's eastern wall saw that there before them, on the sands, an English army lay silent but alert, armed and ready to attack as soon as daylight should appear.

Messengers dashed through the narrow street. Sir Louis d'Estouteville appeared upon the North Tower, rapidly giving orders and sending more messengers running in every direction. Sir Clément du Brée, clad in full armor, made his way up through the Abbey barbican to carry out still other orders of the captain of the guard.

Every soldier in the quarters of the city was ordered to appear upon the walls. The King's Gate was barricaded from the inside. Every soldier in the guard room at the Abbey was ordered to appear, and even the dungeon turnkey, to whom the orders of the captain were carried, hastily rid himself of his official accoutrements and donned his steel cap and his shirt of mail there in the corridor leading to the dungeons, and while he armed himself he asked excited questions of the man-at-arms who had come for him.

The turnkey, last to be notified of all the island's guard, was the last to appear upon the walls, and even as he came the assault began.

A dozen columns of English soldiers advanced toward the wall with their scaling ladders, and as they ran, the archers who were to protect them rained a veritable cloud of clothyard arrows at the defenders on the wall. Here and there a defender fell, while on the wall piles of stones were being collected. Fires

were set to burning under huge cauldrons of oil. Immensely long lances were passed up from the street in order to be used against the men on the scaling ladders if they should be placed against the walls. A huge trébuchet stood on its long wooden legs upon the King's Tower, while the men assigned to it hauled at its great counterweight, prepared the giant stone it was to fling, and set its ponderous trigger.

The English army broke into a cheer as it advanced, and always the cloud of arrows fell among the defenders who hid behind the great wall's outer parapet.

Three thousand English men-at-arms and archers were scattered over the sands. Fewer than three hundred French defenders stood to their weapons upon the powerful wall. The trébuchet released its long and slender arm. The giant sling with its hundredweight of stone swung swiftly up. The sling swung free, and curving out across that army on the sands the ponderous missile flew. Down it crashed, into the very heart of a company of archers. It mowed a swath through them, bounded against a horse and flung the animal aside, broken and maimed. A scaling ladder was raised against the wall, and instantly a group of defenders let fall a stone upon its upper end. The ladder crashed beneath the blow, and the men fled. And now, along a hundred yards of the wall, from the King's Gate to the Low Tower and beyond, the English were in action.

Within the dungeon Christophe suddenly seized Edmond.

"Do you hear?" he cried. "Mont St. Michel is attacked. The guards are called to duty on the wall. Even the turnkey drops his keys and dons his shirt of mail."

"I heard them say we were attacked," agreed Edmond. "Oh, would that I were there."

"Come, boy," shouted Christophe. "Your shoulder. But let me get my hand into that crack and I'll pull the very Abbey down about our ears. Come."

Edmond stooped, and once more Christophe searched for the crack.

"There," he cried, "I have it."

Edmond felt the giant as the fellow lifted himself into the darkness near the ceiling.

"What shall I do?" asked Edmond.

"Stand clear!"

Edmond shrank back, and listened to the man's heavy breathing in the dark. He heard mighty muscles crack. He heard the stone grate as the giant drew one foot up and thrust it against the wall. For full five minutes Christophe struggled, and finally dropped suddenly to the floor, panting.

"Is it too strong?" asked Edmond.

"Too strong for Christophe?" panted the huge fellow. "No. But I must rest."

For five minutes he sat on the floor, breathing great gales of breath, and then he rose once more to his feet. Again Edmond lifted him to his shoulders, and again the giant threw his weight upon the stone. And again he was forced to rest.

Six separate powerful attempts the giant made, and still went back to make the seventh. Edmond's confidence was gone, but once more he lifted Christophe upon his shoulders. Once more the man thrust his hand into the crack. And now the other hand found space within that narrow place. Both feet the giant placed against the wall. He threw his mighty strength into his task. The stone grated slowly as it moved. Once more he pulled. Further the stone was moved. Again and again and again the giant pulled, and finally, with five hundred pounds of stone all but ready to tumble to the floor, Christophe pulled and leaped. Full ten feet from the wall he jumped, striking Edmond and sending him reeling the full length of the dungeon. Even as the boy fell heavily against the wall, a crash as of an earthquake shook the room. A resounding roar

reverberated loudly in the boy's ears, and Christophe roared in triumph.

"It's done!" he cried. "And now we're free!"

He leaped to where the huge stone lay upon the floor, lifted it above his head and crashed it heavily against the door. The heavy oak creaked and split, but held. Again the giant lifted up that awful stone. Once more he swung it high above his head. Once more he cracked it full against the oak. There was a crash—a rush of cooler air, and faintly to Edmond's eyes came the welcome sight of distant daylight trickling through that dark and narrow passage.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE TERRACE WALL

From the King's Gate to the Low Tower the battle raged. But wide though the attack was, its most furious strength was being flung at that section of the wall that lay between the King's Tower and the Tower of the White Horse on the southern side of the little island. In this limited space two thousand men-at-arms and archers vied with each other to be first over the wall.

The trébuchet on the King's Tower flung stone after stone into their midst until the attackers withdrew from its murderous power. But still they fought to surmount the wall, placing ladder after ladder—climbing them, sometimes, until the leading men-at-arms came actually to grips with the defenders on the wall, only to have some great rock crash down the ladder's length, sweeping the crowding attackers from it as flies are swept from the wall by a sweep of the hand. The ladders crashed and were overturned. Crossbow bolts swept down from the crossbows on the walls. Boiling oil was ladled, here and there, over scores of attackers who, unable to resist the pain of the boiling stuff, ran screaming, tearing their oil-soaked clothes off in their efforts to rid themselves of the frightful pain.

Below the wall lay scattered dead and wounded, but heedless of these torn and twisted creatures, new attackers came. Archers from out on the sands sped hundreds of arrows at the defenders, but though a man now and then threw up his hands

and fell with an arrow in his throat, few were the casualties on the wall.

Sir Louis d'Estouteville stood in the very midst of the greatest activity on the wall, with Philippe beside him. Sir Clément du Brée had been assigned to take command of that other portion of the wall that led from the Low Tower past the North Tower and up the steep hillside to the Abbey barbican and the Merveille, beyond which the steep side of the hill and the tree-covered slope made attack impossible.

Again and again the English threw themselves at the wall, and again and again were thrown back. The cluster of sturdy defenders fought like very demons, and cheered as the enemy, despite their determination, gave ground.

Sir Louis smiled grimly.

"If we can hold them back until the tide threatens, we will beat them off," he commented as a lull came. "'Tis seven by the clock. Three hours more and the tide will come. In less time than that the battle will be over."

"Your men fight well, my lord," replied Philippe, "and we have lost but few. The attack seems unlikely to succeed."

Sir Louis grunted.

"We are fighting for our very lives," he commented, "and every man here knows it. But hold fast. Here they come."

Across the sands the English charged again. A score of ladders were being carried by their leaders, and as the attack was renewed, the archers rained their arrows fiercely on the wall's thin line of defenders. A man beside Sir Louis threw up his hands and fell, an arrow standing out a foot behind his back. Another cried out and clutched at a shaft that pierced his throat. Arrows clicked on Sir Louis's armor and Philippe's like hail.

From below the wall came a fierce cheer, and with a crash the twenty ladders were flung upright against the parapet. Instantly a stream of men ran up the ladder rounds. A rock

crashed down, and a ladder split beneath its weight. A lance, thrust against the top of another ladder, pushed it out until, laden with struggling men, it toppled slowly over with a crash of armor and a storm of cries. A laden ladder toppled over of its own accord, carrying with it the one beside it and crashing down upon the pile of dead and wounded at the base of the wall.

But though full half the ladders were broken or overthrown, a group of them, standing close together, remained against the wall, and up these narrow ways ten streams of men poured suddenly upon the wall.

Sir Louis saw the danger before a single Englishman had reached the wall, and boldly took his stand in the very midst of the attack. Sword in hand he slew the first six men who stepped upon the wall, while Philippe, at a little distance, did almost as well.

Almost in a moment these two heavily armed defenders were buried to their knees amid the corpses of the slain, and the first attack, growing stronger now, thrust back the thin line of French men-at-arms who had fought so nobly.

A score of fighting, struggling Englishmen had reached the wall, and in the very centre of that maelstrom of hacking, hewing men stood Sir Louis and Philippe, swinging their great swords, protecting themselves with their shields, thrusting, striking, hacking.

For ten long minutes the uneven battle raged, while other English struggled to the walls. The trébuchet on the King's Tower threw a lucky stone that crashed through four ladders, carrying them to the ground. The crossbowmen, clustered on the Tower of the White Horse, sent many an attacker hurtling from the ladders to the ground. But still Sir Louis and Philippe battled against that overwhelming horde of English.

A dozen men had all but surrounded Sir Louis who, with

his back against the inner parapet, thrust and cut so viciously that not a man among them but thought him a very demon.

An Englishman dashed suddenly at the knight and spitted himself upon Sir Louis's sword. But though that thrust passed through the man's body, Sir Louis could not withdraw his blade in time. In a moment he was buried beneath a cheering, roaring group of English who, confident that the wall was won, cheered loudly with delight.

Philippe, a half-dozen paces distant, and surrounded by his own ring of battling enemies, heard Sir Louis cry out as he fell. In an instant the esquire saw the danger. With that small section of the wall won, more English could mount those few remaining ladders. The little garrison of defenders could never hope to defeat them on the walls. These men must be driven back.

"For God and for Saint Michael!" the esquire cried. He swept his blade in a flashing arc. Man after man gave way before the fury of his attack. Here and there an Englishman, braver than his fellows, tried to withstand the onslaught, only to fall beneath Philippe's crushing blows. Foot by foot he fought his way forward. Man after man fell before him, and more and more the others feared his blows. He saw a group of English endeavoring to lift Sir Louis in order to thrust him over the wall, and saw the disarmed knight struggle fiercely against their overpowering strength. Another man fell beneath Philippe's reeking blade. His point wounded another, who, bellowing in pain, gave way.

"The man's a devil," the fellow cried.

"A devil!" echoed another.

"A devil!" shrieked a third.

On Philippe fought, and now his way seemed, strangely enough, less hard. The men retreated before the very hiss of his sword. He clove a steel cap through with one fierce blow,

and shouted loud as he swung his sword again. And now he had reached the group around Sir Louis. He thrust fiercely and overpowered the nearest. The fellow fell, crying loud for aid. Another blow, and the man at whom it was aimed leaped aside. One more fierce blow, and Philippe was standing above Sir Louis. For a moment more he swept his sword in whistling circles. The English drew back, and the young man, stooping for a moment, lifted Sir Louis to his feet.

"Are you wounded?" he cried.

"No! But my sword is gone."

"Yonder is a battle-axe," cried Philippe. "Follow me and pick it up."

With a yell of victory Philippe dashed forward. The English retreated before his fearful threat, and Sir Louis, clumsily in his armor, clutched the battle-axe and raised it with a shout.

"Together!" cried Philippe. "For God and for St. Michael!"

Together the formidable pair advanced, and from behind them came a score of men-at-arms to aid them. There was a short, fierce struggle. An Englishman fell beneath Sir Louis's awful axe. There was a rush. A rattle of crossbow bolts against the shirts of mail, and the last Englishman on the wall fled across the parapet to the comparative safety of a ladder. A wild cheer rose from the French—the wall was clear of enemies! The English, unnerved and shaken, withdrew to form once more.

From his vantage point upon the tall North Tower Sir Clément du Brée had stood watching since the attack began. His duties had to do with watching those sections of the wall not at the moment under attack—the great bastion, the North Tower, and the wall of the towering Merveille that rose from the steep, tree-covered slope on the island's northern side.

Only a few men were with him and these, in twos and threes, he sent to join their battling companions wherever the wall was threatened most.

Full fifty men he sent before at last he was alone; and then, confident that the fierceness of the attack would prevent for a time any thought of him, he turned about and sped rapidly up the stairs toward the Abbey barbican.

Properly, six men should have been there as a guard, lest the defenders be driven from the walls and require the protection that the barbican offered, but Sir Clément had long since ordered them down to the wall below to join their brothers in the defence of the lower wall. Beyond that open gate, Sir Clément knew, there was no single soldier of Mont St. Michel. Only the thirty monks of the Abbey were within, and they, he thought with a chuckle, were probably frightened and on their knees before the altar of the church.

Quickly the knight passed through the gate, and swung it shut behind him. He shot the bolts, and released the portcullis chains, listening with a smile as the sword-studded steel wicket slid heavily down from above.

He laughed again and hurried into the guard-room, and from there ran quickly through the Crypt of the Big Pillars. In another moment he was in a vestibule, and from there dashed into the Covered Walk. Down a flight of stairs he sped, and finally dashed out a narrow doorway leading to the terrace overlooking the tree-covered slope on the island's northern side.

To the parapet of the terrace he ran and whistled shrilly. Instantly came a reply, and in a moment an armored figure appeared among the trees below.

"Drop the rope!" cried the man as he appeared, and Sir Clément, plucking up a rope that lay hidden behind a stone bench, let one end fall to the ground below the terrace.

Instantly a band of men appeared from among the trees and

joined the first. One of them made fast a rope ladder to the rope's end Sir Clément had thrown down. Quickly du Brée hauled the ladder to the parapet and made it fast, and hardly had he done so when the armored man who had first appeared, began to climb rapidly up, while from every direction among the thickly growing trees came dozens and scores of English men-at-arms, to await their turn to climb the ladder, in order to take the Abbey by surprise—to take by treachery what their companions in arms who were fighting before the wall, could not take by force of arms.

No sooner had the heavy oaken door crashed down before the huge stone hurled upon it by Christophe than the giant gave a roar of victory.

"At last!" he cried. "At last! Free! Free after twenty years! A thousand turnkeys cannot put me there again!"

For a moment he seemed to have forgotten Edmond. He dashed down the narrow passage from which the faint light came, turned the corner at its end, took the six stone steps at a single leap, and turned into another wider passage. So rapidly had the giant run that Edmond had not turned the first corner before Christophe had disappeared around the second, but the boy hurried after him, wondering what terrible thing would happen when this newly released avalanche of flesh should run upon some guard there in the dungeon passages! Edmond, of course, did not realize that within the entire Abbey not a man-at-arms was to be found. He did not know that du Brée had called them forth only to slip through the Abbey barbican and close it against the struggling men who were battling upon the walls below.

Thus he hurried after Christophe, expecting to find the man struggling with a group of armed and armored guards. Around the second corner Edmond dashed, and to his amaze-

ment there, not twenty feet away, stood Christophe, with his hands held tightly over his eyes—motionless and silent.

Edmond's heart gave a leap of fear. Had some guard blinded that great fellow before escaping from his awful grasp?

"Christophe!" shouted Edmond. "What is wrong?"

He ran to the giant's side and seized his arm, darting a quick look about to see what danger might lie near. And in reply Christophe laughed a mirthless chuckle.

"I'm a fool!" the great fellow remarked.

"What is wrong?" demanded Edmond.

"The light from yonder doorway," replied Christophe. "Boy, for twenty years I have lived in that dark dungeon. I cannot face the light of heaven all in a minute and expect to see!"

Edmond laughed in relief.

"Of course," he agreed. "You must try a little of it at a time. Keep your eyes closed and let me lead you. Then you can get accustomed to the light gradually, and all will be well."

For the moment, so intent were they on their escape, that neither of them remembered what they had overheard about the attack, but now, as they climbed a flight of steps and came nearer to the door that led on to the Abbey terrace, distant sounds of strife came faintly to their ears.

"The attack!" cried Edmond.

"Ay, boy," growled Christophe. "It may be that they need our aid."

"Then try your eyes again in this light," suggested Edmond. "Now. Can you see?"

Christophe squinted his eyes and blinked.

" 'Tis overly bright, and strains my eyes, yet can I see. Let me stand here in the doorway for a minute. Then we'll go and aid them. But hold, boy—what goes on yonder?"

The giant, still squinting, pointed down the steps that led

from the doorway to the terrace, and across the terrace to the wall that edged it. There, a knight, clad in full armor, had just whistled and looked over the wall down to the trees below. A faint whistle came in reply, and the knight, stooping behind a stone bench, picked up a coil of rope and dropped one end over the wall to the slope below.

From where the two observers stood in the doorway nothing of the trees below the terrace could be seen, but in a moment they saw the armored figure haul on the rope—saw the end of a rope ladder appear from below—saw him make it fast and signal.

"By St. Michael," whispered Edmond, "it is du Brée—him I told you of! What is he doing here when the city is attacked? It is treachery, Christophe, I'll swear. Come. We must prevent it."

"Hold, boy," growled Christophe. "We have no weapons and he is armor-clad. Find me a club—anything—and I'll dash his brains out."

Edmond scurried back a dozen feet, looking about him. A heavy chain lay on the floor in the shadow, and he seized it, but one end was bolted to the wall.

"Christophe!" he cried. "Here is a chain, but it is fast. Can you tear it free?"

In three long strides the giant was at his side. He seized the chain and with one huge tug burst it from its fastening.

"Here, boy," he grumbled, " 'tis long enough for both of us."

He put one huge foot upon its middle, and seizing it firmly with both hands jerked once—twice—thrice—and the heavy chain snapped.

" 'Tis better than a battle-axe," he growled. "Come. We'll get the traitor now."

Together they ran toward the door, and had no more than reached it when they saw another armor-clad figure climb over

the wall of the terrace from below, and join du Brée. The newcomer turned about, looked over into the trees thirty feet below and beckoned.

"Come, Christophe," whispered Edmond. "Others are coming."

Seizing their sections of heavy chain the two ran down the steps, ready to throw themselves upon the two armored figures. So intent were du Brée and the newcomer on the others who were climbing from below, that Edmond and his huge companion had covered full half the width of the terrace before they were overheard. Then the clink of the swinging chains caught du Brée's ear. He wheeled about and shouted out a warning as he turned. Instantly he whipped out his sword, and stood ready. His companion was almost as quick, and before Edmond and Christophe had covered another dozen feet, two swords were ready to receive them.

"Traitor!" cried Edmond.

"Traitor!" roared Christophe, and the two advanced, each swinging eight whistling feet of heavy chain about his head.

Du Brée leaped forward to strike, but Christophe swept his chain across the knight's sword with the speed of lightning. The links wrapped themselves about the hilt and in a moment the sword was torn from du Brée's hand, to fly hurtling for twenty feet ere it clanged upon the pavement of the court.

Du Brée leaped back and tried to draw his dagger, but Christophe, with one more swing of that awful chain, wrapped the free end of it about the knight's waist, and followed the blow by leaping at du Brée. With one great blow of his giant hand he struck the knight's closed helmet, and beneath that terrible impact du Brée fell heavily against the terrace wall. Christophe leaped after him, stepped with one huge foot upon the prostrate form, and peered over the wall where the ladder hung.

There, within three feet of the top, a man was climbing, and a dozen feet below him another clung to the swaying ladder, while at its foot a great crowd of men-at-arms were impatiently awaiting their turns.

Christophe leaped quickly back and seized the stone bench. With one huge effort he lifted it and with it poised above his head he staggered to the wall. The leading man had placed his hand upon the wall—was about to cross it. He looked up into the face of the struggling giant who, for a moment, held that stone bench poised above the unlucky fellow's head. The man cried out in fear but even as he cried, the bench came down. It struck a glancing blow upon the terrace wall and cut the supporting ends of the rope ladder. There was a cry from the ground below—a sudden scattering of men—and then, in an awful crash, ladder and men and bench fell heavily to the ground and lay there silent and alone, where only a moment before had been the centre of scores of impatient English men-at-arms.

In the meantime Edmond had been having a struggle of his own with the second knight. Christophe had struck first, and the Englishman had seen du Brée's sword go flying before the whipping chain. With that to warn him, he had kept his own blade safely away from Edmond's crude and heavy weapon.

Round and round the young man swept his chain, until it whined and whistled as it cut the air. Time after time he leaped toward his enemy, and time after time the English knight retreated. Now and again Edmond had struck his armor with that flying bit of chain, but still the knight was unhurt—still he held his sword.

For a time Edmond had no plan. But presently, seeing the knight retreat before his attack, the boy began to drive him carefully into an angle in the Abbey wall. A step at a time the man gave way, and Edmond pushed him hard, till finally,

almost without his knowledge, the knight was hemmed in on two sides by solid masonry, and could retreat no further. For a moment Edmond considered, while still he swung his whistling chain, and then he leaped. With a tremendous effort he whipped the chain about the fellow's neck. Three times it whirled around the armored figure before its end struck heavily upon the visor of the man's helmet.

Seizing the chain with both his powerful hands, Edmond threw all his strength upon it. The chain tightened about the English soldier's neck, and in that moment the man was thrown heavily upon the stone pavement of the terrace, his sword flying uselessly from his hand.

Instantly Edmond was upon him. He pulled the dagger from the knight's belt, raised the visor of his helmet and held the blade before his very eyes.

"Yield!" cried the boy.

For a moment the knight did not reply, and then his eyes flickered slightly as he recovered from the shock of his fall.

"I yield," he replied faintly, "I yield."

"Good!" roared Christophe from behind them. "Boy, you are a very general. He never knew what you planned for him. And does not know yet, or I'm mistaken."

Edmond raised himself and looked about. Forty feet away sat Christophe, his body strangely huge and powerful, with his feet crossed before him. Edmond looked again. He could not see clearly what it was the giant sat upon. But suddenly he saw, and laughed aloud, with nervous relief as well as pleasure. For there, sprawled face down upon the stone flags of the terrace, lay du Brée, and Christophe sat most comfortably upon Sir Clément's back.

"You took more time," remarked Christophe, "than I would have done. And so I sat and watched you. But now let us take these prisoners of ours and journey where the fight is thicker."

On the city wall, far below the Abbey's towering heights, the defenders of Mont St. Michel were cheering as if to burst their throats. The enemy had been driven back from their foothold on the ramparts and had attempted half-heartedly to form once more. Another hour remained before the tide would sweep across the sands, but their heart for fighting was gone, and fearful lest the tide might come and catch them there, they were withdrawing, carrying their wounded, but leaving those terrible rows of dead beneath the wall.

Already Sir Louis had sent a messenger to the Abbey to report to Prior Jean, while the knight, with Philippe, stood upon the wall and watched the retreating English with delight.

" 'Twas a gallant defense, Sir Louis," commented Philippe.

"Master Philippe," replied the knight, "without your aid the day might well have gone against us. Kneel before me."

Philippe raised his visor in surprise and stared at the captain's rugged face.

"Kneel!" Sir Louis repeated.

Philippe knelt there on the wall amid the bodies of the slain, and solemnly Sir Louis tapped the young man's shoulder with the blade of his sword that had been found upon the wall by a man-at-arms.

"Rise, *Sir* Philippe," he said. "I have knighted you for valor upon the wall you have so nobly defended."

A man came dashing up the stairway to the wall.

"My lord!" he cried. "My lord!"

"What is it, fellow?" demanded Sir Louis.

"My lord du Brée is gone!" cried the man. "I went, as you sent me, to the Abbey barbican, but I could not enter. The gate is closed and the portcullis is down. My lord du Brée was seen, by Lady Claire, to go within while the battle was at its height. He closed the gate and the portcullis, and has not since come forth."

"Come, Sir Philippe," roared Sir Louis. "I must see to this."

Down from the wall the two strode, and through the narrow street, between lines and lines of cheering citizens. Up the flights of steps at the steep street's end they climbed toward the closed gate and the lowered portcullis.

They came upon Lady Claire as she stood on the Great Outer Stairway, and though Sir Louis asked not a word, the girl saw the question that was written plain upon his face.

"I saw Sir Clément as I stood in my garden," she began. "I was intent upon the attack, but could not see it well. Thus I watched the nearer guards upon the wall. In pairs and threes I saw them ordered to the defense, and finally Sir Clément alone remained. Then it was he turned about and ran up these steps. He lowered the portcullis and closed the gate."

"You saw no more?" demanded Sir Louis.

"Nothing, Sir Louis. He has not since come forth."

For a moment the three stood on the steps in silence, and as they stood there, a huge voice came from behind the gate.

"I know, boy," it said. "I know. Many a time have I opened this very gate, and I can do it now. Here. Hold this prisoner of mine. I'll open it again."

Sir Louis stared in amazement. The gate swung open with a crash, and between the bars of the sword-studded portcullis the three on the steps saw a strange sight.

There stood Edmond with a sword in his hand, threatening two armored knights from whose heads the helmets had been taken. One helmet Edmond held upon his hip. The other sat rakishly on the huge shock of untrimmed hair that hung down about the shoulders of a veritable giant. And as they watched, the giant seized the portcullis chains. With the utmost ease he swung the heavy grating up, and, as Sir Louis and his companions advanced through the opening, the big fellow

seized Sir Clément du Brée and as he did so saluted the newcomer boldly.

"What does this mean?" roared Sir Louis.

Edmond saluted.

"My lord," he replied, "but a little while ago this giant Christophe and I escaped from the dungeon where he has spent twenty years. As we came forth, we saw my lord du Brée as he was aiding a band of English soldiers up the wall on to the Abbey terrace. Christophe struck down my lord du Brée, and swept two men from off the wall. I overcame this English knight, whose name I do not know. By good fortune we came upon them in the nick of time, for no others reached the terrace."

"By St. Michael," roared Sir Louis, "is this story true, du Brée?"

Christophe pushed Sir Clément forward, while still the man's huge hand half surrounded the knight's neck.

"Tell my lord," roared Christophe. "But mind you well—tell him the truth!"

"Speak," ordered Sir Louis.

"I was defending the terrace against them," began du Brée weakly.

"The truth!" roared Christophe, clamping his terrible hand tightly about the back of Sir Clément's neck.

"My lord," cried du Brée, wincing beneath the power of the giant's hand. "You will not judge me on the word of a common fisherman!"

"By St. Michael!" cried Sir Louis. "It is true. Last night he told me of your treachery, but I believed him not, and sent him to the dungeon. But now I know 'twas true. Nay, I'll *not* judge you on the word of a common fisherman? I'll turn you free upon the sands so that you may join the English who are your friends.

"But listen close to me. We thought that we upon the walls

had saved the city from the enemy. And lo! It was this fisherboy and his giant companion who saved the day. The giant I never saw before, and I shall reward him later when I learn his story. But this fisherboy, whose word I may not take to judge you by, is from this moment a fisherboy no longer. Nor is he a mere man-at-arms. For his success in defending Mont St. Michel from the treachery of Clément du Brée, I hereby make him an esquire, a man of gentle blood—a worthy gentleman, whose word from now on I may take in very truth, when he brings me news of treachery!"

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE ARMY ON THE SANDS

For a week Mont St. Michel celebrated the victory. The entire population attended the Abbey church where thanks were offered by Prior Jean Gonault. The little city's single street was lined with decorations, and leaden figures of St. Michael were to be seen sewed to the crown of every hat.

True to his word, Sir Louis had had Sir Clément thrust forth upon the sands within ten minutes of his appearance at the Abbey barbican, and the sentinels on the wall had watched him as he hurried away, amid the jeers of the throng that had gathered at the King's Gate. The sands lay before him, and as he started he could see the stragglers of the defeated army making their dejected way far ahead of him. He had need to hurry, for the tide had turned, and to be caught by the sweeping waters midway between the islands was to be drowned. He paused only to shake his fist at the frowning walls before he hurried out upon the sands. To the watchers on the walls his figure grew smaller and smaller as he made his way toward Tombelaine, hurrying forward while the tide came sweeping in across those miles of empty sand. Nor had the knight more than reached the postern gate of the English stronghold when the rising waters followed at his very heels.

But ere du Brée had departed, Edmond's prisoner asked the disgraced knight to carry word of his own capture, and gave him a note requesting that his ransom be sent at once. It was only then that Edmond knew who it was that had fallen into

his hands. No mere knight, this. Instead, he was Lord Richard Rumsey, Baron of Poole, a very valuable prisoner indeed, whose ransom, when it was paid by a messenger, in exchange for the baron's liberty two days later, and whose armor, which automatically became the property of his captor, were more than ample to make possible Edmond's changed status as an esquire and a gentleman. For Sir Louis, honest soldier that he was, had lost no time in betaking himself to Prior Jean, and after being closeted for an hour with him had come away with the necessary authority to elevate Edmond to the position he had promised.

It was a tremendous gathering of citizens and soldiers that filled the Abbey church, three days after the conflict, to see Edmond made an esquire. Never before in the memory of anybody present had so great an honor fallen to one of common blood in all Mont St. Michel. Some there were who mumbled their criticism, it is true, but they were few, and when Prior Jean led the tall young man up to the altar, and in the simple ceremony blessed his sword and belted it about him, there were none present who were not glad.

Carried through the street and up the endless steps by servants of Lady Claire, Arnaud sat breathlessly excited beneath the vaulted ceiling of the church, all but overcome at this astounding honor that was being paid his son. Lady Claire and the Countess du Val were eager in their praise, and Sir Philippe de Courtenay, with Sir Louis d'Estouteville, solemnly stood beside the youth who had thus sprung, at one great leap, from among the common people of Mont St. Michel to a position among the great elect—who, from being Edmond the fisherman, now bore a name of his own choosing and was thenceforth called Edmond du Mont.

It was Lady Claire who first greeted him when the ceremony was over.

"I give you my good wishes, Master Edmond," she said as he turned about. "Nay. Thank me not. Your father is eager to speak to you now. But remember: the house that is my countess mother's home and mine is ever open to our friends, of whom we are glad to count you as one."

Robert le Sagittaire had saluted the new esquire as though he had been Sir Louis himself, and Christophe, a man-at-arms once more, in charge, with Robert, of the King's Gate, saluted in his turn. He tried to speak gently, but in the lofty church his huge voice boomed like thunder.

"My salutations, Master Edmond," he bellowed. "I owe you my freedom. Command me as you will."

On Tombelaine Robert Jolivet raged. For the better part of a year he had been trying to capture Mont St. Michel; for two years and more he had been plotting its overthrow. And now he seemed to be as far from victory as he had been before he had made his first move against the island city.

"Ventrebleu!" he roared as du Brée tried to explain the causes of their ill-success. "What do I care for explanations! I want Mont St. Michel, and I chose you to aid me. And now a fisherboy has driven you out of the place and you are worth nothing to me!"

He clasped his hands behind him and strode frowning up and down the very room into the fireplace of which Edmond had fallen nearly a year before, his robe swinging with his fierce stride, his shoulders drawn up, his head thrust down, and his lips forming whole sentences he did not speak.

"Why not attack with your cannon?" asked du Brée. "Had your soldiers had the hardihood to withstand one lone man upon the wall this very day, the place had been yours now. We have been defeated by a combination of circumstances that cannot arise again. The wall—a single esquire who, now,

has been knighted for his success—and two escaping prisoners. Those were the difficulties that prevented our success.

"Batter down the wall with cannon. Neither esquire nor knight nor prisoner can stop you then. For eight hours, or more, the sands are free of the tide. Spend six of those hours hammering at a section of the wall, and then, with two hours left, launch every man you have into the breach. The place will fall at once, and—to make up for my failure of today—I shall be the first upon the wall. Three hundred men cannot hope to stop three thousand."

For another full minute Robert Jolivet paced up and down the room and finally he stopped, facing du Brée. Still his hands were clasped behind his back. Still his shoulders were hunched, his head drooped. He stood with his feet wide apart, with his eyes on the seated knight before him.

"Du Brée," he said at last, "for two years I've listened to your plans, and for two years you've failed. Once more I'll follow your advice—but I warn you: if this should fail, I'll thrust you forth upon the sands as Louis d'Estouteville did, and leave you as friendless among the English as you are friendless among the French.

"Now go. Make your plans. Prepare for this attack. Take what time you need. But when you strike, remember that to fail again will be failure indeed for you!"

Within a week after their victory the citizens of Mont St. Michel were living their normal lives once more. The English no longer pressed so closely about them as for a year they had been doing. The fishermen fished almost where they pleased. Food began to come again from the mainland, and had it not been for the many signs of activity among the garrison on Tombelaine, the Abbey and the little city might almost have believed that no further dangers lay in wait for them. But

a lifetime in the wars had taught Sir Louis not to hope too soon, with the result that Mont St. Michel remained as carefully guarded as ever it had been, while the men-at-arms were busy every day with tasks having to do with strengthening the walls, with building new machines for casting stones, and adding a strong new set of gates in the arch that pierced the heavy wall.

Sir Philippe de Courtenay now served in the place left vacant by the exile of du Brée, and Master Edmond du Mont (who still felt unfamiliar with the name that he had chosen for himself) had been chosen by Sir Philippe as his esquire of the body. His duties were warlike, for war was in the air. Had peace prevailed he would have waited on his knightly master at his meals. He would have carved the meat—would have proffered the first cup of wine to him—would have laid the table when chess was to be played. In addition, of course, to these personal duties he would have perfected himself in the use of arms. But with the enemy so obviously preparing for some other military activities, Edmond was relieved of those personal services that were the duty of every esquire in more normal times. Thus he aided Sir Philippe in his duties about the walls, and in his spare moments practised at riding the great war horse that Prior Jean had given him, and of which he was inordinately proud. With Sir Louis and Sir Philippe to instruct him when they could spare the time, he rode forth upon the sands and there beneath the walls he strove to learn to mount and ride, to wield sword and battleaxe and lance.

In the narrow tilt-yard where once he had overcome a fellow man-at-arms, he now rode daily at the quintain, thrusting with his lance at one end of a pivoted bar mounted across the top of a post set firmly in the earth. The end at which he thrust, each time he galloped toward it, was smaller than the shield he carried on his left arm, while from the other end of the crossbar dangled a heavy bag of sand.

Time after time he struck with his lance upon the space intended for it, only to be struck heavily by the whirling, swinging bag of sand. Once, so great was the blow, that he was dashed clashing from his saddle, and lay blinking at the stars he saw until Christophe came striding forward to pick him up and help him to his saddle once again.

But though his time for such exercises was not great, he gradually, within a few weeks, grew sufficiently adept to strike that crossbar squarely and dodge clear of the heavy bag of sand.

The heavy armor that he wore was the very suit that had become his when Lord Richard Rumsey had returned to Tombelaine upon the payment of the ransom, and though the armorer had had to lengthen it a bit here, to change the shape of a plate there, it fitted him with remarkable perfection.

But though his time was largely spent at his work with Sir Philippe and at his martial exercises, he went, from time to time, to visit Lady Claire at the house she and her mother occupied high up on the little island's slope, near the Abbey barbican.

"Your martial exercises are progressing, Master Edmond," she said one day a month after the victory. "You have an aptitude for arms that many an esquire born to gentle blood might envy."

"I thank you, Lady Claire," replied the young man, "but it seems to me that I am overly rough to be an esquire and to be taught the use of the weapons of chivalry."

Lady Claire laughed.

"I have seen esquires born of noble houses who were more rough than you, Master Edmond," she told him. "Chivalry, even for the highest-born, is something to be learned. You need have no fears, for 'tis plain that though, perhaps, more practice will do you no harm, you can hold your own even now with many esquires more experienced than yourself. I had

not thought, when first I knew you as a fisherlad, to see you come to be first man-at-arms and then esquire!"

Such conversations only caused the youth to throw himself into his work and his exercises more furiously than before. He would practise until he could practise no longer, and then, to rest, he would make his way to the fine new quarters that he and his father shared near the first of the stairs leading to the Abbey. There he would talk of arms and armor, of chivalry and war until, warned by his father that he must sleep, he would tumble into bed and go to sleep at once; only to dream of those activities that occupied his every waking moment.

In all this, Christophe was Edmond's very shadow. When the giant's duties called him to the King's Gate, no man-at-arms in all Mont St. Michel was more faithful. But every other moment the giant spent at Edmond's heels, like some great, kindly dog ever ready to do his master's bidding. He spurned the quarters of the men-at-arms, and slept upon the floor before Edmond's bedroom door, nor would he listen to any suggestion that he use a more comfortable bed.

"*Mon Dieu,* Master Edmond," he bellowed in explanation, "for twenty years I slept on the stone floor of that dungeon, and now these boards do seem as warm and soft as down. But if you would make me more comfortable, I would that you would find some weapon for me that would be fitted to my strength. These tools are tools for babes. Look you. What can I do with this?"

He drew the sword that hung at his side and with his great bare hands bent the blade double.

"Do please, Master Edmond, find me a weapon with some weight to it. An axe is what I most would like to have."

So to the armorer went Edmond, with the giant at his heels, and a week later a great axe had been made, an axe so great that neither the armorer nor his assistant could shoulder it save

with an effort. And when the terrible weapon was placed in Christophe's hands, he bellowed his pleasure in an endless flow of words, and swung the heavy thing about his head until the flashing light from the enormous weapon wove a dancing circle in the air.

"*There* is a tool fit for a man-at-arms!" he roared. "Oh, Master Edmond, when are the English like to come again? 'Twill be a pleasure to try this out on them!"

Six busy weeks passed by, and Edmond, more at ease, now, in the new world in which he moved, knew that he had made some progress in the martial practices that had taken so much of his time. But though he could ride passably well, and though he could wield his sword as well as any, he knew better than did any other at Mont St. Michel how much more time he would like to spend in preparing himself to perform his duties to his own complete satisfaction. And he knew, too, that the enemy on Tombelaine was not likely to give him much more time. Two miles away though they were, to the clear-sighted guards upon the tall North Tower it was obvious that some new activity was about ready to begin.

Edmond had arisen with the earliest dawn, and with Christophe following after, had gone forth to the ramparts, there to look toward Tombelaine in an effort to see what new plan the English had devised. Every morning the young man made it a point to look toward Tombelaine, for it was only from that direction that danger was likely to come.

But this morning Sir Louis and Sir Philippe were both ahead of him, obviously intent upon some new activity that was taking place about the postern gate of the island stronghold. The tide had ebbed, and only a few trickling rills of water remained upon the sands—rills that were slowly making their winding way in the wake of the departed tide. Between Tombelaine and Mont St. Michel lay no obstacle to bar the way. And there,

outside the wall of the distant fortress, a thousand men were gathered on the sands—a thousand men whose numbers were every moment growing greater, as a constant stream of men-at-arms and archers, of knights and squires came through the narrow postern gate.

The early morning sun shone sparkling on a thousand flashing helmets and steel caps. Bright flashes shone like sparks as the lance heads of the knights glinted in the sunlight. And now a hundred horses, straining at the ponderous loads to which they had been harnessed, plodded slowly out upon the sands, while the soldiers marched in columns all about them.

"They come again," growled Sir Louis as Edmond appeared. "But I would I knew what engines of war those horses bring."

"It may be they are cannon, my lord," offered Edmond.

Sir Louis grunted.

"I know naught of cannon save by hearsay," he replied, "but if what I have been told is true, then we are like to need our strength this day. Sir Philippe, call every man-at-arms to duty. Until we learn which portion of the wall is to be attacked we cannot be certain where to post them. But probably the same section that they chose before will be their choice again, and if it is, I shall take command there. The rest of the wall I leave to your command. Have six trusty men at the Abbey barbican, with orders to keep the gate open in case we are forced to retreat within the Abbey. If I fall, you are to take command. If you fall in your turn the duty will devolve on Master Edmond here.

"In the meantime, Master Edmond will command the wall from the Low Tower up to the Abbey, and will take up his post here upon the North Tower. Two score men he can have, but no more, for we cannot spare them. The priests of the Abbey will, by Prior Jean's orders, serve as sentinels about the Abbey's northern and western sides. The enemy can make no head-

way there without aid from within. As for you, Sir Philippe, you are in command of everything save that section of the wall where the attack is heaviest. Go now. See that the King's Gate is firmly closed and locked. See that every man is at his place. See that the women of the city are sent within the Abbey. Order the men of the town to congregate at the Abbey guardroom, and see that they are armed as well as may be with the weapons that are there. Let them use what armor you can find, as well. And if any of them have weapons that they prefer to use, permit that. Men fight best when their hands are familiar with the weapons they wield.

"And hold. One thing more. These citizens are our only reserves. Our soldiers must instantly go to the walls. Unless I am mistaken, this attack will far surpass the last, and some time these citizens must come into the battle. Tell them not. But you, Sir Philippe, and you, Master Edmond, take these men when they are needed. But remember. Not until no other way remains.

"Go now. And see that my orders are carried out."

Sir Philippe saluted and ran down the steep flight of steps that leads from the North Tower. In another moment a dozen messengers were carrying his orders hither and yon about the city. Files of women, each burdened with household valuables, toiled up the endless steps to the Abbey barbican, and thence up the great stairway leading to the guardroom and the church. Men-at-arms came forth from their quarters, arming themselves as they came. Children shouted excitedly as, aiding their mothers, they carried shapeless bundles up the street toward the Abbey. Fishermen and laborers, burghers and shopkeepers made their serious way to the Abbey guardroom, there to receive weapons, shirts of mail and steel caps from Robert le Sagittaire.

Finally every man-at-arms was at his post—every woman

and child was within the Abbey church—every citizen was armed and waiting in the guardroom behind the Abbey barbican. Still Sir Louis stood upon the high North Tower, watching the columns of the enemy as they advanced, and still Edmond stood beside him while Christophe with his great axe held lightly in his hairy hand, stood frowning by, eager to fling himself upon those soldiers who had been sent out by Robert Jolivet, the very Robert Jolivet who had so treacherously thrust the giant man-at-arms into the terrible dungeon where he had remained for twenty endless years.

And now Sir Philippe reappeared.

"Your orders have been carried out, my lord," he reported.

" 'Tis well, Sir Philippe," replied the captain. "I go now, to take my place. See? They choose the section I had thought they would. And Master Edmond was right; they come, this time, with cannon. May God and St. Michael aid the right!"

He strode off down the steps, encouraging the men-at-arms he passed with words of confidence, and Edmond saw him disappear beyond the great bastion that thrusts itself forward from the city's eastern wall. A minute later, a mighty cheer from a hundred honest throats greeted him as he appeared upon the wall near the Tower of the White Horse, before which, at a distance of a hundred yards, the English had stopped with their huge bronze cannon.

Neither Sir Philippe nor Edmond could see the defenders on that distant section of the wall, but clearly they could see every movement of the English. Thousands of men formed behind the battery of cannon, and slowly the great guns were turned on the sands until their monster muzzles pointed ominously toward the wall they wished to breach.

Tensely the defenders gazed out toward those strange implements of war, fearful of the horrors they might inflict, but sturdily remaining at their posts of duty.

The cannon were aimed—a line of them—and now groups of men came forward with bags of powder, and others rolled huge round stone cannon-balls up to the muzzles. Two score men were gathered at their work about the ponderous weapons, loading, carrying powder, struggling with the giant cannon-balls. Among the English as among the French everyone was intent on the activity of those few men. And then Sir Louis spoke.

"Take your crossbows, my men," he ordered, "and loose your bolts all together. See what toll you can take among yonder group of grimy bombardiers."

Silently a hundred men wound back the heavy strings of their crossbows, nocked their bolts, and aimed.

"Let go!" cried Sir Louis, and a hundred heavy bolts flew out as one, flew forward like an angry swarm of bees, and fell amid the gathered bombardiers. A dozen men fell writhing to the sands. A score retreated, fumbling with their wounds.

A roaring cheer rose from the ramparts of Mont St. Michel, and one lone English gunner, his cannon loaded, set his glowing match to the cannon's charge. An enormous cloud of smoke burst from the weapon's mouth, hiding the gun from sight. A long bright stab of fire shot through the billowing smoke. A huge round cannon-ball of stone flew curving upward. The roar of the cannon filled the air. For one tense moment the projectile flew, and then crashed ponderously against the rampart's outer parapet. The cannon-ball bounded back upon the sand, but where it had struck, the stone had split. A broken block lay tilted out of place. A man-at-arms lay dead beside the splintered stone.

From the sands came a fierce and mighty cheer from three thousand English throats. The battle had begun.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE BATTERED RAMPARTS

For six crashing, smoke-filled hours the battery of guns bombarded the slowly crumbling wall. Drifting, fleecy clouds of smoke stabbed through by long thin tongues of flame, hid the English army from the sight of the helpless defenders on the wall. Crossbowmen, sheltering themselves behind the parapets, sent their whistling bolts where the smoke was thickest, but the English, protected now by heavy mantelets of wood that they wheeled out before the cannon after every shot, loaded and fired with exasperating regularity, heedless of the efforts of the French. Stone after stone was hurled against the enemy by the trébuchet on the King's Tower, but finally a cannon-ball crashed through the tower's light parapet, bounded through the timbers of the ungainly machine, and left it overturned, dangling awkwardly 'twixt heaven and earth all but ready to fall from the tall tower's inner side.

Cannon-ball after cannon-ball crashed against the broken ramparts. Loosened blocks of stone were tossed about. Broken masonry fell amid great clouds of dust down to the sands outside, and to the narrow street within. Slowly a great section of the powerful wall was being reduced to a shapeless heap of rubble. Full half the wall that stood between the Tower of the White Horse and the King's Tower was tumbling into a smoky mound, upheld here and there by some more sturdy bit of masonry, but slowly crumbling down to make a way by which those waiting thousands of the enemy would

soon come charging up against the pitifully small body of defenders. Now and then a cannon-ball crashed through a roof within the town. Now and then one bounded back from some stronger section of the wall. But try as he would to plan some method of defense, Sir Louis, from his post upon the Tower of the White Horse, could think of none.

The English were running out of ammunition now. A body of men, protected by their wooden mantelets, approached the wall and bore off a few of the cannon-balls that lay at the foot of the heap of broken stone. These, in time, were fired and finally the firing ceased. The clouds of smoke drifted slowly away, and there upon the sands Sir Louis saw the columns of the enemy massing for their rush upon the broken wall. Three thousand men were making ready to attack fewer than three hundred. The enemy from Tombelaine was preparing, at last, for the final step in the capture of Mont St. Michel.

During half the day the bombardment had continued. During half the day the soldiers of Mont St. Michel had fumed and fretted helplessly, gathered in groups here and there where Sir Louis had ordered them to go for safety. Now, with a great section of their wall reduced to a shapeless pile of stone, they would be called upon to face an army full ten times their own number—they would take their stand upon the remnants of that battered wall and fight until they fell.

They heard Sir Louis shout his orders, and sternly they obeyed. They took their posts, sheltering themselves as best they could among the cracked and broken stones. They heard a cheer from out upon the sands, and now they saw the enemy advancing. Crossbows spit forth their hail of bolts. Here and there a man fell writhing on the sands. But heedless of the sting of arrows the attackers came. They reached the foot of the tumbled débris. A leader among them shouted, and

with a cheer they charged, covering the sloping pile of rubble in a moment—swinging their swords, cheering, crashing against the defenders of the wall.

The slope was covered with advancing men. Swords swung up and down in the furious dance of battle. Minute after minute passed, but still the thin line held. Sir Louis, his armor flashing in the forefront of the fight, swept man after man down the slope before him, bringing new heart to his disheartened men with every stroke of his heavy blade. They cheered and flung themselves anew upon the foe. All along the battered section of the wall the battle grew in fury, but where one man of the attackers fell another took his place, while to the wall no new defenders came to take the places of the fallen.

High on the tall North Tower, almost at the other extremity of the city's wall from where Sir Louis fought, two armored figures stood, and along the curve of the extended wall between the North Tower and battered section where the battle raged, two score of eager men-at-arms, set to watch against surprise, leaned upon their weapons and prayed to St. Michael that they might yet be ordered to join the fight. No sight of the battle was possible to the men on the North Tower, for roofs and towers and hillside intervened. But passed along the wall from sentinel to sentinel, came word, now and then, of how the battle went. Now, as the English swept up that battered slope, word came again.

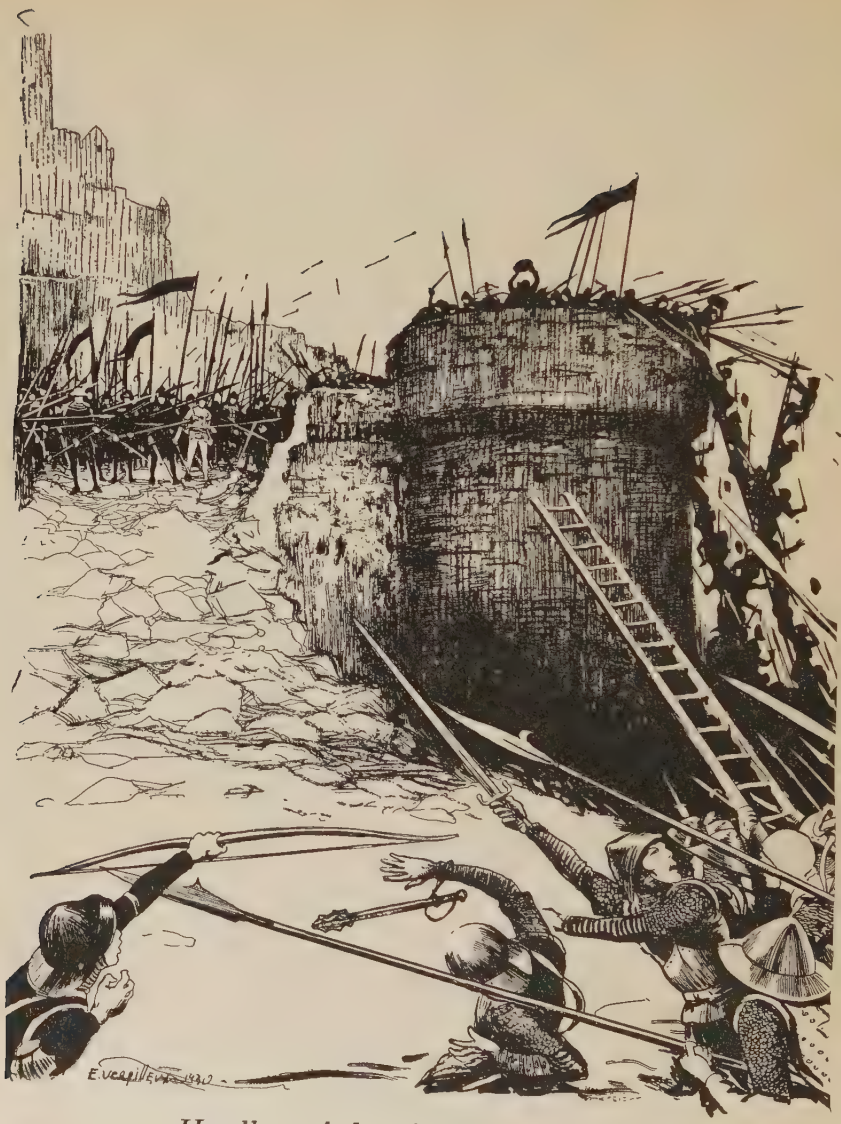
"Sir Louis cannot hold!" cried one.

"He cannot hold!" another called.

"He cannot hold!" ran the word along the curving wall up to the tall North Tower.

For hours Sir Philippe had stood there with Edmond, following the orders laid upon him by Sir Louis.

"He needs aid," said the knight, and clashed his visor shut. "Remain here, Master Edmond. Keep the guard that has



Heedless of the sting of arrows . . .

. . . the attackers came.

been set lest we be surprised. You are in command of all this section of the wall. I go to aid Sir Louis."

"Hold, Sir Philippe," cried Edmond. "Take these sentinels that line the walls. Leave Christophe with me, but take the others. Sir Louis needs their help!"

"And leave the wall without a guard? Nay, I cannot."

"Take them," insisted Edmond. "Have you forgotten? Two hundred honest fishermen and laborers and burghers are armed and waiting in the Abbey barbican. I shall call them to take the places that these soldiers leave. Go. Take these two score men-at-arms."

"Good," replied Sir Philippe. "I'll take them, but call the citizens and place them on the wall. Lose no time. I am going now."

He dashed along the wall, his sword waving in his hand.

"Follow me," he cried as he passed guard after guard. "Come! For God and for St. Michael!"

Two score fresh men leaped after him. Along the curving wall they ran—cheering, crying out encouragement to their struggling fellows. Past the great bastion—past the Tower of the Iron Horse—past the Low Tower they ran. Across the Tower of the White Horse they dashed, and threw themselves upon the enemy. Hacking, hewing, thrusting, they cut their way up to Sir Louis's side. They cheered and were answered with a cheer. Sir Louis looked about and raised his hand.

"Welcome," he cried. "Welcome, and follow me!"

Furiously the defenders threw themselves upon the enemy. For a moment the English attempted to hold their ground, but before the fury of the French the struggling enemy stepped back. Back again and back they stepped, leaving their dead and wounded here and there upon the broken wall.

"Hold!" cried an armored figure in their midst. "Hold!"

The retreating English steadied.

"Forward!" cried the voice again, and now the enemy threw themselves anew into the battle. Battering, shouting, lunging, they fought their way once more up that steep and irregular slope. Resistlessly they hewed their way. Slowly the French were forced back and back and back again. Three hundred Frenchmen had begun that fight an hour before, and of that heroic band a hundred now lay dead upon the stones.

On the English came, and on. Over the broken wall they fought their way. They reached the crest, and for a moment could gain no further. They threw themselves more furiously than ever upon the defenders who were crowded there. Sir Louis and Sir Philippe were all but overcome by weight of flesh alone, but for a time they held their ground upon that bloody heap of stones. A new column of the English swept into the breach, and now, overpowered by the attacking thousands, the French were forced to give a foot—two feet—three. Thrust back by the very weight of men, they were forced down and down the broken rampart's inner side.

Still at his distant post upon the North Tower, Edmond watched and listened for word of how the battle went. Following Sir Philippe's attack the joyous word had come that the English were beaten back. But now, for a time, no word had come at all. For only a moment had the walls over which he had been ordered to watch been free of men. As Sir Philippe had gone, taking with him the men-at-arms, Christophe had come running with the citizens who, following Sir Louis's orders, had armed themselves and waited within the Abbey barbican. Now, from the barbican itself, past the North Tower, down almost to where the battle raged, Edmond's two hundred citizens sternly took the places that had been left by the men-at-arms. Armed with axes, scythes, and swords, with harpoons, pikes, and clubs, these common folk of Mont St. Michel

stood as ready to give their lives as did Sir Louis and his men-at-arms.

But still no word came along the curving wall to Edmond's ears. What did it mean? His own good judgment told him that word of victory would have come to him. Defeat, too, would tell its story. Was the struggle still unchanged?

"What is the word?" he cried.

"What is the word?" he heard repeated.

"What is the word? What is the word?" followed faintly and more faint as the question passed down along the curving wall. And now he heard the reply—still too distant to make out the words. But there it was—repeated again and again.

"Sir Louis holds!"

"Sir Louis holds!"

"SIR LOUIS HOLDS!"

But almost instantly another message came. Edmond strained his ears to hear, but the roar of the battle all but drowned it. And then he heard.

"Our men retreat!"

"Our men retreat!"

"OUR MEN RETREAT!"

Another message followed, and instantly another.

"Our men retreat. They give way!"

"The English are within the wall!"

Since early morning Edmond had remained impatiently there at the post to which Sir Louis had assigned him. When first he had come up to the North Tower on that tragic day, the sun had barely risen, and the slender shadow of the spire of the Abbey church lay far across the smooth sands to the west. Now the day was almost spent—the sun had passed the noon and was gliding slowly down the western sky. In all that time he had struck no blow for his endangered island home. In all that time he had aided not at all.

And now the enemy was within the wall! What should he do?

He ran down the flights of steps between the North Tower and the great bastion, peering to see whether or not he and the two hundred citizens might aid. But he could only see the crowding English on the sands, pushing toward where the wall had crumbled down—pushing in order to climb that steep pile of crumbled stone. Still the sounds of combat came from the narrow street within the wall. Sir Louis had not surrendered yet. Nor would he! But what could Edmond do?

Without realizing what he did he raised his eyes to where the figure of St. Michael stood upon the Abbey's slender spire. He did not pray, but in his heart there must have been a prayer, for it was to the island's patron saint he looked. The English were within the walls! What could he do against them?

As he raised his eyes up to that bronze statue, he saw it etched against a fleecy cloud that for a moment had obscured the sun, and as he looked, the cloud slid slowly by—the dazzling sunlight broke brightly forth anew. His eyes were dazzled by the blinding light. He looked away, and saw upon the wall, almost at his feet, the shadow of the island's patron saint. There, lying upon the wall, with the slender sword pointing clearly out across the parapet, the shadow of St. Michael lay.

"The shadow!" shouted Edmond. "The shadow of the sword!"

"What is it, Master Edmond?" cried Christophe.

"The shadow," repeated the young man. "Look! St. Michael gives a sign! His sword points out our way to us. The English have broken through the wall. They will not think to guard their rear. Get ropes. Call these men from off the wall. Let them gather on the great bastion! We go upon the sands!"

A dozen men dashed headlong toward the Abbey barbican.

Scores—a hundred—two hundred men congregated eagerly upon the wall's great bastion. Great coils of ropes were hurried from the guardroom—were fastened to the outer parapet, and dropped to the sands below.

"Follow me!" shouted Edmond, swinging himself over the edge, and sliding to the ground. All about him men followed swiftly, urged to speed by Christophe on the wall above. And when the last of them had reached the sand and was sheltered from sight of the English by the bastion's heavy wall, Christophe seized a rope and followed.

"We are ready, Master Edmond," he growled. "We are ready. And now, by St. Michael, I'll baptize my axe!"

"Creep beside the wall," ordered Edmond. "Be as silent as you can. It may be we can creep close to them unseen. And when I cry the charge, follow me most fiercely! We are outnumbered, but they do not know we come."

Rapidly, in single file, the bold two hundred hurried. Close against the frowning wall they kept, about the great bastion's outer end. Under the smaller tower that stands beyond it and toward the Low Tower they made their way. Out upon the sand they saw scattered parties of English, but so intent were the enemy on the broken wall that not a single eye noted the advance of the little band. On and on, still beside the wall, the bold two hundred hurried, until, not more than twenty yards ahead, the Tower of the White Horse thrust its ponderous wall out upon the sand.

Edmond waved his sword, and those behind him gathered in a powerful little column.

"For God and for St. Michael!" he cried. "Charge!"

Out about the Tower of the White Horse they ran, their weapons swinging, their voices pent up, for the moment, the better to surprise the enemy. But as they swung about the tower, a wounded Englishman lying on the sands spied them and

shouted loud in terror. Another man took up his cry, and another, while there upon the wall across which they were making their way, a thousand men stopped suddenly. Ahead of them the English knew, Sir Louis and his soldiers stood, still holding their own within the city's narrow street. Now from behind them charged this new army. How many men were coming they did not know, nor, in their excitement, did they pause to see. Then, before they had recovered from their surprise, Edmond and Christophe were among them. One crashing blow of Christophe's awful axe shore a man in two and smote another down. Each time that dreadful axe came down, a man fell to the sands. Beside the awful giant with his frightful, bloody axe, Edmond swung and thrust with all the strength that lay in his sinewy body, while behind these two came two hundred other furies. Scythes swung in awful, maiming arcs. Harpoons flashed and took amazing toll. Clubs beat down the guards of swordsmen, and dashing down upon their heads left them senseless on the sand.

Before any attempt was made to resist this sudden new attack, Edmond and his followers were so intermingled with the scrambling, frightened English that it was impossible for the surprised enemy to tell the number of its attackers. On and on swept Edmond and his men. Still Christophe's axe swept man after man to the ground. Clear across the column of the English the surprise attack ran, cutting the army of the enemy in two. Edmond and Christophe turned about. Once more they cut their way into the very heart of the English, and Edmond, conscious that the English feared the tide, cried boldly to his men:

"Strike them down! Strike them down! Do not let any escape. The tide is coming now."

He swept his blade down upon a man-at-arms who threatened him.

"The tide!" he cried. "'Tis coming!"

Well he knew that the tide was not coming for an hour. But he knew as well that these English did not know it! He wished that he might have spoken in their tongue, but he could not, and so cried out again in French, knowing that there were some among the enemy to whom his words were clear.

"The tide!" he shouted. "'Tis coming."

He thrust fiercely at another man, who ran from him, and in a moment more Edmond was beside Christophe.

"Christophe!" he cried. "Hold that axe a moment. Shout with those lungs of yours. Shout as I do. The tide! 'Tis coming in to drown them."

Christophe swept his axe out to strike a foeman down, and as the man went staggering to the sands, his huge voice boomed out.

"THE TIDE!" he roared. "'TIS ON THE WAY! HOLD THEM! HOLD THEM! THE TIDE WILL DROWN THEM ALL!"

There was a flurry among the enemy. A Burgundian had heard and understood that terrible message. He turned to run, and others turned to follow him.

"The tide!" he shouted, and others took up the cry. "The tide! The tide! The tide!"

And though the tide had still six long miles to come, that fearful warning broke the spirit of the surprised and frightened English. Here and there a man broke clear and ran. Here and there a dozen followed. A score scattered across the sands, and a hundred turned and ran. Another hundred broke away, and those who had fought so fiercely to burst their way across the broken wall turned about to see their supporters streaming out across the sands toward Tombelaine. They saw men leap upon the waiting horses that had hauled the cannon across the sands—saw them slash the halter ropes, and go

dashing madly for safety from the French and from the sea. And on the wall, the braver English soldiers, who had been at the very forefront of the attack, found themselves between these new attackers on the sands and the renewed strength of those who fought within.

Sir Louis did not know what had happened to throw the enemy into such confusion at the very moment when the city was so nearly won, but good soldier that he was, he asked no questions and merely threw himself the more furiously into the fight. Foot by foot he and Sir Philippe, with their worn men-at-arms, won back the ground that they had yielded inch by inch. Up the inner side of the battered wall they fought their way, and when they reached its top, it was to see the giant on the sands outside, hewing as no giant ever hewed before. Past him the English soldiers ran, and ever and anon the great axe fell, while Edmond, fighting fiercely, hacked and hewed and cheered his men. Now the enemy broke in utter rout. They threw their swords away and ran, and as they ran Edmond drew his men clear of the breach once more, shouting his warning of the tide, frightening the defeated army more.

But still upon the wall a little band of English fought. No fear had caused them to turn about and flee. A hundred of them, perhaps, made up that sturdy band, and throughout the fight they had borne the greatest of its weight. Up the broken wall they had fought their way, and down its other side. Into the very street of Mont St. Michel they had fought, bearing back Sir Louis and Sir Philippe and all their sturdy men-at-arms. But now, their support gone, their army broken and put to flight, tired after two hours of fearful struggle, the band could do no more. An armored figure in the party's midst thrust his red sword through a Frenchman and withdrew the blade. He looked about. Near him on the wall lay hundreds of the

bodies of his fellows. Across the sands sped clouds of routed men.

"It is of no use," he muttered, "but I shall never leave." He raised his sword again, and threw himself once more into the fight.

On the sands just below the battered wall Edmond looked up to the crest. There, fighting sturdily against Sir Louis's tired men, that sturdy hundred English stood. To clear them from the wall would mark the victory. To clear them from the wall would end the battle.

"Christophe," cried Edmond. "Gather our men."

In a moment those who had come with Edmond had crowded to his side.

"One more charge and the day is won," cried the young man. "Follow me!"

With a cheer of victory, his men dashed after him as he climbed the steep and rocky slope. Christophe was beside him, his axe ready, his giant steps covering the slope with ease. Up and up they climbed, and from Sir Louis's men came a cheer. The English turned about. A hundred and fifty men faced them from the inner side—a hundred and fifty were now climbing toward them from the sands. It was hopeless, but well they knew that they must try. As one man they turned and charged down the corpse-strewn slope. Midway they met the climbing band. Christophe's axe swept ten men to their deaths in as many strokes. Edmond, fresher than these men who struggled with him, bore down four. All along the line the fresher men whom Edmond led overcame the worn warriors who had fought their way over the wall and back. Within five minutes hardly thirty men remained of the hundred who had come charging down the slope, and now that armored figure who, until now, had been in the very forefront of the English in the fight swept his sword at Edmond.

"Du Brée!" cried Edmond, in sudden recognition of the man's battered shield. "Come to my blade!"

"Who are you?" cried the knight.

"Edmond, the fisherman," shouted the squire, "who followed you to Robert Jolivet's own room on Tombelaine—who wounded you in the ambush on the road. With this giant at my side I found you aiding the enemy to enter the Abbey. And now I find you on the walls. Come, du Brée!"

"A fisherman," sneered du Brée. "I fight no fisherman. Make way for a nobleman and a knight."

He took a step forward as if to pass, but Edmond thrust at him with his blade.

"You shall not pass," he cried, "save over me."

"So be it," cried du Brée, and swept a sudden blow at Edmond's helmet.

The squire stepped back to dodge the blow, and as he stepped he slipped. Backward he fell among the corpses and the rocks, his sword gripped tensely in his hand. But though he still retained his weapon, he fell heavily among the fragments of the wall, crashing in his armor. He barely knew what happened next. He saw du Brée leap fiercely at him. He felt a heavy jarring blow upon his helm, but he did not realize that, to shield himself, he drew his sword arm up and held his blade upright. Nor did he know, when he felt his sword torn from his hand, that du Brée, striking madly at him, had slipped and fallen in his turn upon that upraised blade—had fallen and impaled himself upon its point, when the long blade found its way through a gash in his armor made half an hour before by Sir Louis in the street beyond the wall. Nor did Edmond realize that the last heavy blow he felt upon his chest, before everything went black before him, was caused by du Brée's own fall across the body of his adversary.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

SIR EDMOND DU MONT

EDMOND struggled back to consciousness and looked about him. His first realization was that his head ached painfully. He closed his eyes for a moment and opened them again. Then he realized that his helmet had been taken from his head, and that instead of being on the rough slope of the crumbled wall he was in a room. He closed his eyes tightly in an effort to ease his throbbing head, and for a moment lay still, catching his breath because of the pain. He heard a rustle beside him—a faint rustle—and opened his eyes again, to see a face above him —a beautiful face, he thought, but who—? Oh, it was Lady Claire. What was she doing there? Those fiercely fighting English. She should be taken away. There was danger. The battle was won, he knew, but still there were some of those enemies of France to be overcome or routed. He tried to speak.

"Sh," said Lady Claire, laying her hand upon his forehead. "Don't speak. Don't even try."

He closed his eyes and frowned. Evidently she failed to realize the danger. He *must* say something.

"The English," he finally whispered. "Take care. You shouldn't—"

"The English are gone," she replied softly. "They are all gone. Rest, if you can. There is no danger."

Still she held her hand on his forehead, and it seemed to ease the throbbing pain. He closed his eyes again.

"Try to sleep," she whispered.

He tried to smile, but he was very tired, and seemed to ache from head to foot. She had told him to try to sleep. He would.

He awoke and found the sunlight streaming into the room. His headache was gone now, but he felt sore and stiff. He tried to move, and groaned in surprise. A terrific pain shot through his head, and he lifted his hand to his forehead. To his amazement, his head was swathed in bandages.

His mind was alert now, and he lay still. To attempt to move was much too painful. But he could look around a little. The bed in which he lay was one he had never seen before. Its heavy, carved posts reached almost to the ceiling and supported a heavy canopy of velvet, embroidered with gold thread. The room was not very large, but it was larger than any room in the new quarters he and his father had taken. The furniture was richer, too, and all unfamiliar.

His eye fell on a richly upholstered chair, on the back of which a coat-of-arms was embroidered. He looked at it closely. That was strange. It was the coat-of-arms of the du Vals.

Where was he? How had he come here? He remembered nothing save that he had fallen, and du Brée had leaped at him—had struck him. After that he had known nothing, save that he had dreamed that Lady Claire had told him to try to sleep, and had held her hand on his forehead. But *had* that been a dream? He had had a headache, he remembered—or had he dreamed that? It seemed strange that one should dream of having a headache.

It was too much for him to make out. He wouldn't try. It was comfortable lying there—if he didn't move.

He heard a lock click faintly and saw a door across the room as it swung open. Lady Claire entered on tiptoe, and he closed his eyes. This was no dream, he felt certain. He

would open his eyes in a moment to make sure. No. She was there.

"Good morning, Sir Edmond," she said.

"Morning?" he asked. Where had the afternoon gone? It had been afternoon when he had fallen there on the crumbled wall. But instantly another question came to him.

"Sir Edmond?" he asked.

She smiled.

"Have you forgotten?" she asked.

"Forgotten what?"

"That you are now Sir Edmond."

"But I am not *Sir* Edmond," he objected faintly. "And you said 'good morning.' What day is this?"

"The second day after the battle," she replied. "You awoke for a moment yesterday, and have slept since then."

"Where am I?"

"In my home," she replied, "where you were brought after you fainted on the wall."

"Then the English were overcome?"

"Certainly. You saw them flee."

"I saw them fleeing, but there were some still on the wall when du Brée struck me down. I remember nothing more."

"You remember nothing more?" she cried.

"Nothing."

"You don't remember being dragged to your feet by that giant of yours after you slew du Brée?"

"Du Brée?" he asked. "I harmed him not a whit. It was he who struck me down."

"Nay!" she cried. "You slipped—Sir Louis told me so himself. And du Brée threw himself at you, and you raised your sword and slew him as you lay among the stones."

He blinked in surprise.

"I know naught of it," he admitted. "What else happened?"

"Why!" she began in amazement. "It is as I say. You slew him as you lay among the stones, and he fell dead across you. Then it was your giant plucked him off and lifted you to your feet. And you climbed a dozen steps up the wall and stood there before Sir Louis, swaying from the wound du Brée had given you when he cut through your helm after you had slipped and fallen. And Sir Louis, seeing that you had led the attack that routed the English, called upon you to kneel. He told me himself that you fell to your knees more because of weakness than because he called upon you to do so, but even so he gave you the accolade there upon the wall, and even as he touched your shoulder with his sword you fell forward in a faint.

"Then it was your giant picked you up and carried you most tenderly over the wall and down to the street. By then the news of the victory had reached the Abbey, and those of us who had been pent up there came running forth. So I came upon Christophe, carrying you as a mother might a babe, for all that you were in your armor. Great tears were rolling down his face with every step he took. And I spoke to him, asking him of your wound.

" 'I know not,' he admitted. 'But it may be he is dead.'

"So I ordered him to bring you here, and here you are—not dead at all!"

Edmond lay gazing at her, astonished.

"And I am knighted?" he whispered presently. "Tell me true, Lady Claire. Do not cozen me."

She leaned over him and smilingly shook her head.

"I do not cozen you," she replied softly. "I swear by St. Michael that every word is true. You are a knight, Sir Edmond. A very gallant knight."

For another moment he lay still, trying to grasp what she had told him and finding it impossible.

"But I have done naught for which I should be knighted," he objected.

She smiled again.

"Do you remember for what Sir Philippe was knighted?" she asked.

"Ay," he replied. "He stood beside Sir Louis, and nobly aided him to hold the wall."

"Do you think that what he did earned him the right to knighthood?"

"Oh, ay, Lady Claire, a thousand times!"

"Then list to me," she went on. "Two days ago Sir Louis and Sir Philippe and all their men were driven from the wall. They were fighting in the street, and were giving ground. The Abbey and the town were all but lost—when *you* came with your men, and it was *your* bravery and *your* strategy that routed the English and drove them headlong back to Tombelaine. You saved Mont St. Michel! Did you not justly earn your knighthood?"

He smiled.

"You make me sound almost a paladin," he replied. "But what I did seems less than that to me."

She rearranged his bandage, and told him to rest.

"I've talked with you more than enough," she explained. "Go to sleep, and when you wake there will be others come to see you."

He watched her as she left the room, and lay musing over the astounding news that she had brought. But presently he fell asleep, and evening had come before he awoke again. A fire was glowing in the fireplace, and candles burned upon a table at the far end of the room.

For a moment Edmond thought himself alone, and raised his hand to his bandaged head. He found that, though he was

still stiff and sore, he could move with less discomfort. But no sooner had he raised his hand than Lady Claire rose from a chair before the fire and came to the bedside.

"Feeling better?" she asked.

"Oh, ay, Lady Claire," he replied. "Methinks I am all but well."

"Not quite," she objected. "But you will be soon. All day your father has been here, hoping to talk to you if you should awake, but half an hour ago he told me he thought you would sleep until morning, and so he was carried to your own quarters. He will be sorry. But there is another who is waiting, even now, upon the stair. He has not left since first he carried you to this bed."

"Christophe?" asked Edmond.

She nodded.

"May I see him, Lady Claire?"

She lifted her finger and tiptoed toward the door, opening it softly and beckoning. There was a movement on the steps outside, and Christophe entered, stooping to pass through the doorway. He tiptoed almost noiselessly across the room, with Lady Claire beside him. The girl seemed amazingly slender and fragile beside the burly giant.

"Welcome, Christophe!" Edmond greeted him.

"My boy," whispered Christophe, "you *are* alive again?"

"Again?" laughed Edmond faintly.

"My boy," the giant protested, "you would not joke if you had seen yourself as I saw you last."

The big man's voice was growing greater despite his desire to be gentle.

"Nay," Christophe went on. "When I climbed these stairs and laid you on this bed, I swear I thought you dead. So did Bertrand, the barber-surgeon. We stripped you of your armor, and Bertrand said there was no doubt that you were dead,

but that he would bleed you anyway, and mayhap bring you back to life. When he got out his knife to do so, I could stand it no longer. Good lack! This knight du Brée had bled you with his blow that split your helm. And, thinks I, if du Brée's bleeding has brought my young master so close to death—if indeed he is not actually dead—then will this Bertrand probably finish up the job. So I put him aside, and pushed him, gently like. And lo, the awkward fellow staggered clear across the room, and, the door being open, he staggered through it and fell—I tell you true—he fell clear to the floor below, and broke his collar-bone, or his neck, or something. But whatever it was, we are well rid of him.

"And then, Master Edmond, did Lady Claire take command. She ordered me hence, saying I was too sturdy a lad to nurse a sick man. She seemed to fear I had no lightness to my touch. And since then, Master Edmond, not another soul—"

"Sh, Christophe," interrupted Lady Claire.

"Nay. I'll not be stopped," went on the giant. "Since then not another soul has tended you—day or night. Bertrand would certainly have finished you, and it may be I would have done the same, for I know little of sick men. But truth it is, Master Edmond, she saved your life when not another soul in all Mont St. Michel thought 'twere possible.

"Ay, this little lady is one in ten thousand! Ay! I'll take my oath there's not another in all of France who is her equal. And boy, you are a knight now. Take my advice and marry Lady Claire. You owe it her, and she you, for—"

All through this long harangue, Lady Claire had been trying to make some impression on the giant—trying to check his booming flow of words. But in vain—and now she was blushing furiously, while still she plucked at his sleeve and tried to silence him.

But Edmond, who at first had been interested in Christophe's

account of what had happened, raised his hand when the giant went so far.

"Silence, Christophe!" commanded the young man. "You know not what you say. I am not worthy to touch Lady Claire's finger-tip. She is intended for the courts of kings. She will some day marry a great noble. You and I, Christophe, can only hope always to be her servants."

"Now listen to him, Lady Claire," bellowed Christophe. "He says he is not worthy of you. Tell him he is wrong."

Lady Claire blushed again.

"He is worthy of any maid in France," she admitted. "But he is growing tired and must sleep. You must go, Christophe. I shall let you see him again on the morrow."

Christophe nodded and crossed the room, closing the door softly, while Lady Claire still stood beside the bed.

"Good lack!" muttered Edmond. "Please, Lady Claire, do not hold his bold speech against him. He knew not what he said."

She took his hand for a moment and smiled.

"Methinks he knows better than do you, Sir Edmond," she whispered, and with that she was gone.

Edmond heard the rustle of her skirt as she crossed the room, heard the faint click of the lock as she closed the door behind her. She was gone, leaving him to wonder at her words.

Another spring came in its turn to Mont St. Michel, and now a truce was signed between the English and the French. Robert Jolivet had given up the task he had set himself, and had once more journeyed away never to be heard from again. Sir Philippe, now that the way was clear from Mont St. Michel to the Castle of Loches, returned once more to serve his feudal lord, the Count de la Perche. But this time the Countess du Val and Lady Claire did not go with him, for Lady Claire, standing

before the altar of the Abbey church, had become the wife of Sir Edmond du Mont, who, six months before, had been made second to Sir Louis in command of the guard at Mont St. Michel.

Great was the celebration in the little island city when Sir Edmond and his bride were married by Prior Jean Gonault. Joyous was the throng that lined the Great Outer Stairway as the two came down from the Abbey church on their way to the very house to which Edmond had been taken by Christophe when the newly made knight had collapsed before Sir Louis on the wall. And of all the throng, Arnaud was the happiest, as Christophe and Robert le Sagittaire carried him down the stairs behind his knightly son and his noble daughter.

Many were the changes that had taken place since the victory had been won. The battered wall had been rebuilt. Outside the King's Gate Sir Louis had erected a sturdy barbican to strengthen the little city's defenses against the attacks of cannon. Within the new advance post that stood beside the barbican gateway lay two of the huge cannon that the English had abandoned when they had fled before the surprising attack of Master Edmond du Mont and his two hundred men.

Five hundred years of peace and war and revolution have passed since Sir Edmond and his bride walked down the Abbey stairs to the house upon the hillside near the Abbey barbican, but still the Abbey stands in all its beauty, high upon the crest of the little island mountain. Still the powerful tides sweep in and out across those strangely level sands. Two miles away lies Tombelaine, silent now—deserted. Long since, the ramparts that defended it have crumbled and collapsed, but still the ramparts of Mont St. Michel stand between the little city and the tide. Still the tall North Tower looks out toward where the enemy once dwelt.

Should you ever go to see the marvels of Mont St. Michel, and should you make your way through Pontorson out to the great King's Gate, you will find within the advance post that Sir Louis built those two ponderous old cannon that once blew heavy balls of stone against the city wall, and threatened the lives and liberty of all who dwelt behind it. And when you make your way along the frowning ramparts, be sure to look high up to where St. Michael stands. There, upon the very apex of the slender Abbey spire, the statue still is watching. Still the armored arm holds high the blade that long ago cast its shadow on the wall, pointing out the way to Edmond, the son of Arnaud—the way across the sands against that English army—the way to victory, to knighthood and to honor!

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